

How Well Is Peer Review Working in Your Unit?

Guide for Unit-Level Self Study

Peer review is important to faculty members' development as teachers. It is also a CBA-mandated part of multi-faceted evaluation of teaching at the University of Oregon. Peer reviews are required for each faculty classification and rank on the following schedule:

- Career Instructional Faculty – once per contract period
- Assistant Professor – once per year
- Associate Professor – once every other year
- Full Professor – once every three years

Departments may find it timely and valuable to assess their peer review practices as UO revises its teaching evaluation instruments and protocols to ensure that **faculty receive actionable feedback** for their own purposes of continuous improvement and that **evaluation is fair and transparent; informed by data collected from peers, students, and instructors themselves; based on clear definitions of teaching quality** rooted in the university's broad "inclusive, engaged, and research-led" pillars.

This brief guide has been developed to help departments make determinations about whether their peer review practices are serving them well and to give concrete ideas for how to improve them to make the most of the time and care faculty invest in peer review.

I. COORDINATION AND LABOR

Questions for reflection and discussion:

- *Do you ever have to rush to get a peer review done to get it into a file for midterm review, promotion, tenure etc.?*
- *How are peer reviews coordinated in your unit? Who decides when a review needs to be done and who will do the review? How does your unit account for the labor of peer review?*

If the department finds that the peer review process often feels poorly timed and accounted for, you might consider:

Solution One: A coordinator to track department peer reviews

Each unit/department might appoint a faculty or staff member as Peer Review Coordinator to oversee the scheduling of all peer reviews for the year. The peer review schedule could be shared with all faculty by week 1 of Fall term so that adjustments can be made if needed/requested.

Solution Two: Trained Peer Review Committee as part of service profile

Each unit could identify and train a group of faculty to serve as peer reviewers. Participation would count as important unit/department level service, and typically requires 4-6 hours of service per faculty review. The unit/department could either train all faculty, or only the subset of faculty who will perform all peer reviews for the year. Faculty who will serve as reviewers should be identified at the start of each academic year.

Note that serving as a peer reviewer is a practice the Teaching Engagement Program notes as evidence of an engaged teacher--a pillar of teaching excellence. Many faculty report that observing colleagues' teaching is fascinating and rewarding for their own development. Some departments provide small stipends for faculty who take on particular service obligations coupled with additional training (advising, mentoring)—a Peer Review Committee might be further supported and incentivized in this way.

II. USEFULNESS IN EVALUATION

Questions for reflection and discussion:

- *Are classroom observations done with a blank piece of paper and only the reviewer's personal beliefs about teaching as a guide? As a reviewer do you find yourself counting "um's or like's" and the number of students online shopping?*
- *Does the peer review report feel like a creative writing assignment, or read like a love letter?*
- *Do peer reviews as currently conducted in your unit help to differentiate between faculty who are meeting, not meeting or exceeding your unit's expectation for teaching?*

To ensure course observations are consistent across faculty and a valuable window into teaching quality, you might consider:

Solution One: Formal and evidence-based observation tool

Observation tools can vastly improve upon entering a colleague's classroom with a blank sheet of paper; they can build consistency and direct the reviewer's attention to practices that are consistent with the scholarship of teaching and learning and the department's shared definition of teaching quality. You might consider the following found at tep.uoregon.edu/peer-review-teaching:

[TEP Peer Teaching Observation Guide \(customizable\)](#)

[COPUS: Classroom observation protocol for undergraduate STEM](#)

Solution Two: Template for peer review report

By creating a template for the output of a Peer Review, the unit/department, school/college and university personnel committees can expect consistent, robust reports that provide information that is valuable for both a) continual course improvement and b) evaluation of teaching excellence. The report could include the following sub-headings:

- **Overview**
Include the course name/number, time and date, and the topics under discussion that day. Include the context of the course, size of the class, type and level of students (majors/non-majors, freshmen/seniors, elective/required course).
- **Information collected**
Description of the information collected from:
 - classroom observation tool
 - self-assessment tool
 - answers to questions posed during reviewer-instructor follow-up meeting.
- **Recommendations**
Based on the information collected, provide recommendations to the individual being evaluated that will continue to support student success through the use of inclusive, engaged and research-led teaching in the context of the specific course under review. The recommendations will provide insight regarding the progress toward teaching excellence.
- **References**
Provide a list of references that form the basis for the classroom observation tool, the self-assessment tool and the questions for the follow-up meeting (which will be the same for all reports from one unit/department).

[The Department of Human Physiology](http://tep.uoregon.edu/peer-review-teaching) has a template online as an example tep.uoregon.edu/peer-review-teaching

III. USEFULNESS IN FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

What did you find most valuable and least value in your most recent peer review?

Some faculty report never learning of the results of their peer review (usually when documentation of it was rushed into an evaluation file), or finding the feedback somewhat useful but not well connected to their own goals—or, indeed, to any sense of shared goals. If that's the case, you might consider:

Solution One: Faculty self-assessment tool

The unit/department could identify a self-assessment tool that is included in the peer review process. Self-assessment tools provide the faculty member the opportunity to reflect on their teaching practices and observe changes over time. The tool selected could provide opportunities for specific recommendations for continued improvement. Published tools found at tep.uoregon.edu/peer-review-teaching include:

[TEP Faculty Self-Assessment Guide](#)
[Teaching Practices Inventory developed for STEM and Social Sciences](#)

Solution Two: Structured reviewer-instructor follow-up meeting

After the classroom observation and faculty self-assessment has been completed, the reviewer and faculty would ideally meet to find out more about the faculty's inclusive, engaged and research-led teaching practices. A consistent list of questions could be outlined by the unit/department, which could form the basis of the discussion and be included in the report. Unit-developed questions could include references to the scholarship of teaching and learning in the discipline and align with the department's vision and learning objectives, or the following can be used:

- How are you working to create inclusive learning environments where all students belong, are represented, and have a voice?
- How do you continue to learn and grow as an educator; what specific goals do you have for your own development, and how do you plan to meet those?
- How do you infuse your course with current research or creative activities, or engage your students directly in scholarly and creative processes; how are you including evidence-based teaching methods in your course design?