



## Guidelines for Peer Observation Associated with Review Letters

If you are asked to observe a peer for evaluative feedback, plan on a pre-observation meeting to go over syllabus, course design and goals for the class, and plan on observing two different sessions for at least an hour<sup>1</sup>. You may wish to stay the entire class or leave during a break (You may observe two different hours of the same course or 1 hour each in two different courses.). The purpose of the two separate meetings is to ensure that your observations reflect consistent teaching and student reactions and that there was not something out of the ordinary for that day. You should also plan on a post-observation meeting to go over your feedback. You are not responsible for assessing the content of the course; rather focus on pedagogy, the classroom setting and student reactions and learning.

### Pre-Observation

Ask for the syllabus (or syllabi) for the class to familiarize yourself with the course objectives, pedagogies, and the specific expectations of the day(s) you will be observing. Schedule a short meeting with your peer prior to the scheduled observation(s) to discuss the course objectives and what he or she expects to accomplish during that period.

### Observation

Arrive five minutes early and sit in the back and side so that you are not only observing your peer but also the students' actions, reactions and interactions. Ask your peer to introduce you at the beginning of the class time so that students know why you are in the class. Take notes on what you are seeing both with the instruction and student reaction at least every 5 minutes. Don't give in to the temptation to summarize: suspend judgment and just start by jotting down what you are seeing around you.

You will want to focus your attention on three aspects of the class: 1) curriculum, 2) classroom management and 3) student engagement and learning. The list below is not meant to be exhaustive nor do you need to address all of these items. But these are typical activities to pay attention to when observing SPU classroom experiences.

- **Pedagogy**
  - Are learning objectives for the day clearly stated, easy to infer from introductory material, or written somewhere for students to see? How did they align with the overall objectives of the course and those listed in the syllabus for the day?
  - Was the day's material linked to prior days' classes?
  - Was the material presented in a coherent manner?
  - As appropriate, did the instructor meaningfully integrate Christian faith and / or address faith-discipline intersections?
  - If technology was used, did it enhance presentations, involvement and/or opportunities for learning?
  - Were reading materials or other assigned media integrated into the class time?
  - If there were handouts, notes or other electronic resources, did students use them?
  - Did the instructor summarize, ask students to summarize or work with students to talk about appropriate applications?
  - Did the instructor mention expectations for the next class period?
  
- **Classroom Setting**
  - Did the class start and end on time?
  - Did the instructor maintain eye contact with students and know their names?

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<sup>1</sup> Preferably stay for the entire session as possible

- How was the pacing of the material? Did the instructor speed up in order to “get through” material?
  - Did the instructor create “learning pockets” where students engage with the instructor or each other?
  - Did the instructor ask questions in a way that he or she genuinely wanted to hear what students think?
  - How would you describe the class atmosphere (Rigorous, challenging, intellectual, respectful, energetic, encouraging, etc.)?
  - Did the instructor check in with the students periodically to insure that they were following along and absorbing the material?
  - Did the professor check for student understanding by asking appropriate questions?
  - How did the instructor respond to student questions?
- **Student Reactions and Learning**
    - Were students willing to be involved or were just a few or none participating? Was there any sense that some students were favored over others?
    - Were students asking questions and offering insights to the instructor and each other creating generative learning?
    - Were the students bored, hostile, passive aggressive, checked out or engaged with other electronic media (texting or face book)?
    - Did you observe evidence of student learning?
    - Did the instructor give students time to reflect on their own learning for the class period?

Soon after you observe the first class, summarize what you saw and then draw some preliminary conclusions. During the second observation “test” your hypotheses. Did you see similar patterns or anything new that appears to be unique to the material, students, that day and / or the course?

### **Post Observation Meeting with Your Peer**

Before writing your letter, meet with your peer to provide preliminary feedback. You can set this time up when you originally agree to observe the class (go ahead and set up pre meeting, observations and post meeting – and the date that the letter should be submitted). While the idea of this meeting may seem intimidating it will be very helpful for your peer to hear your observations. Give your observations across these three areas including summaries of strengths and areas of development. You should also consider using this time to ask clarifying questions which may help you with some points in your letter.

### **Writing the letter**

Letters tend to be about two single spaced pages. Address the letter to the chair of your peer’s review committee and cc your peer. Begin with an introductory paragraph describing the course(s) and the times that you observed. Give the background of week in the quarter, classroom (e.g. active learning or traditional classroom) approximate number of students and topics covered. If the two sessions were quite dissimilar, make sure you note any different circumstances.

Start with your summarizations around pedagogy and provide specific examples to make your point. Move on to class room setting. This will probably be the longest section of the letter. Again give summaries with examples. Next, focus on student reactions and evidence of student learning. End your letter with a summary of what went well or strengths and what were developmental issues or areas that you believe your peer could focus on. When you finish your letter, submit it to the chair of the committee and send a copy to your peer.