

Senate Committee on Teaching and Advisement
Brown Bag Discussion
April 9, 2008

I'll Show You Mine if You Show Me Yours: The Value of Peer Observations

- The following summary is based on the discussion among eleven faculty members who attended the Brown Bag. Every attempt was made to capture the ideas, opinions and strategies discussed by those attending.
- The discussion was timely as we were able to review the recent report of the Ad-hoc Committee on Evaluating Teaching Excellence--specifically, the committee's recommendation to capture one's teaching over time through peer observations. They also recommended the observations, along with other evidence of teaching, be part of a faculty member's UPRC review.
- The FC RTP dropped student interviews from the tenure and promotion review process and are now left with a candidate's own statement regarding teaching as well as the university student evaluations.
- The issue whether or not peer observations should be available to and used by others for evaluation purposes was raised repeatedly. There were arguments for both sides of the issue.
- Faculty believed the emphasis of peer observations should be as a tool for oneself; to use the observation as a tool of professional development. There was a general sense that faculty can help change the culture and encourage peer observations.
- It was suggested that the presence of an observer in the classroom might influence students and alternatives to in-person peer observation were offered such as videotaping or simulcasting. Many spoke of the value of video- or audio-taping themselves teaching. Concern was expressed that additional burden should not be placed upon faculty to have themselves taped.
- It was noted that guidelines for peer observation and a form for summary write up are available on the intranet under Faculty Forms.
- Who should do the observing? Some faculty believed it is difficult to observe a colleague teach a class you teach yourself. While other faculty suggested that best practices has peer visits and observations among colleagues who teach the same courses.
- Co-teaching was mentioned as a new initiative that offers colleagues regular opportunities to reflect on and plan instruction together.
- Course coordinators are another initiative used to offer syllabi and implementation consistency across multiple sections of a course.
- Several faculty stated the importance of any peer observation being a complete observation, that is, the observer should stay for the entire teaching session.

Submitted by Jean Harris
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