Constructive Peer Review of Teaching

Before we get started, take a few minutes to reflect and write:

- When kinds of experiences have you had with receiving constructive input on your teaching from peers?
- What challenges have you faced with making peer review of teaching constructive?

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Session Outline

- Peer Review Expectations and Purposes
- Assessment of Teaching as a Data Question: How Do You Get Useful, Trustworthy Data on Teaching?
- Creating a Constructive Peer Review Process

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Some Common Assumptions about Teaching in Higher Ed

Teaching Effectiveness is a Function of Content Expertise

Assumption: If you know it, you can teach it

“Our students are fortunate to be able to take classes with someone who is widely recognized as a leading expert in the field.”

Observations based on this assumption focus on course content: Does the instructor know the material? The reviewer is there to see if there might be a problem with the instructor’s expertise in the field.

Teaching Effectiveness is a Function of Instructor Social Skills

Assumption: If students like you, they will learn

“The instructor is clearly well-liked by students.”

Observations based on this assumption focus on apparent student attitudes: Do students seem comfortable with the instructor? The reviewer is there to see if there might be a problem with the instructor’s social skills.
Some Common Assumptions about Teaching in Higher Ed

Teaching Effectiveness is Uncomplicated

✓ Assumption: We all teach well

“The class session was appropriate for these students, at this level.”

Observations based on this assumption focus on observer perceptions of assumed practices: Does the instructor do what I do? The reviewer is there to see if the instructor needs to become more like the reviewer.

Assumptions are all true, to some extent

“Learning can and often does take place without the benefit of teaching – and sometimes even in spite of it – but there is no such thing as effective teaching in the absence of learning ...”

“Teaching without learning is just talking.”

Tom Angelo & K. Patricia Cross (1993), Classroom Assessment Techniques.
Peer Review Expectations and Purposes

If teaching is more than just talking, then what is it?

How do you get useful, trustworthy data on a complex, dynamic social phenomenon that cannot be easily measured?

Getting Useful, Trustworthy Data on Teaching

Assessment of Teaching is a Data Question: How Do You Get Useful, Trustworthy Data on Teaching Effectiveness?

- No shortcuts: Quality of data is directly related to quality of methods used to collect it.
- Learning-focused: Instructor expertise, student engagement, and approaches to teaching are all means to the same end
- Inquiry-Guided Peer Review: What do you want to find out? For what purposes? For what audiences?
- Integrative: How can different sources of data be brought together to provide a composite picture of teaching effectiveness?
Getting Useful, Trustworthy Data on Teaching

Learning-Focused

Student Learning
- What helps students learn?
- What challenges to learning do students typically face in trying to learn this material?
- How does this course help students face the challenges?

Instructor Learning
- What helps instructors learn how to make changes in their teaching?
- What do instructors learn from assessment of their teaching?
- What next steps does assessment of teaching lead to?

Inquiry-Guided Peer Review

- Pre-observation questions for the instructor:
  ✓ What goals do you have for teaching and learning in the class session(s) to be observed? In the course as a whole?
  ✓ What would you like to develop or improve in your teaching?
  ✓ What are the challenges you’ve been encountering with this particular group of students? How have you been trying to address these challenges with your students?

Practice: Take 2 minutes to reflect and write your responses to these questions with respect to a class or workshop you will soon be teaching.
Getting Useful, Trustworthy Data on Teaching

Inquiry-Guided Peer Review

- Before observing ...
  - What can you (the observer) look for to help address the questions identified by the instructor?
  - Considering the nature of the course and the challenges it poses, what else will you be looking for when you observe the class?

- While observing ...
  - Keep instructor goals for the observation in front of you
  - Focus on descriptive notes, for later evaluation of further questions
  - Identify questions you want to ask after the observation

Practice: Observe 5 minutes and note (1) what you see, and (2) what you might want to ask this instructor later. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6U-4gQk1M]

Post-observation discussion and analysis

- What did the instructor observe? (what was typical or atypical about the class period, what went according to plan, what will happen next, etc.)
- What did the reviewer observe that addresses the issues identified prior to the observation?
- What other questions does the evidence raise?

Documentation

- Documentation of the observation vs. documentation of the review
- The instructor should always have a voice in documentation of the review.

Practice: Role play as MIT professor and observer. What would you be saying in the post-observation discussion?
Getting Useful, Trustworthy Data on Teaching

Integrative

- More than one type of data
  - Reviewer observations of classroom
  - Indicators of student learning - sample student work
  - Student perceptions - student ratings, midterm feedback
  - Course documents - syllabus, assignments, course resources
  - Instructor self-assessment with respect to class session, issues or questions identified in the pre-observation discussion

- More than one perspective represented
  - Faculty, student(s), department
  - Perceptions, performance, change over time

Getting Useful, Trustworthy Data on Teaching

Integrative

- More than one point in time
  - More than one class visit, in person or by video
  - Follow-up instructor/observer communication
  - Evidence obtained later - follow-up activities in later class sessions, subsequent student performance

- Instructor self-assessment and interpretation of data
  - The instructor should always have a voice in documentation of the review.
Creating a Constructive Peer Review Process

Assessment of Teaching is a Data Question: How Do You Get Useful, Trustworthy Data on Teaching?

The review process yields more useful data when:

- A systematic procedure is in place so the instructor and the reviewer know what to expect before, during, and after the review.
  - Timing, purposes, pre/post observation communication and documentation...
- The instructor plays a central role in guiding the process.
  - As an instructor, it is something that is done for you, perhaps even initiated by you, rather than something that is done to you.

Creating a Constructive Peer Review Process

Assessment of Teaching is a Data Question: How Do You Get Useful, Trustworthy Data on Teaching?

The review process yields more useful data when:

- It is used to foster dialogue and professional development among peers, both before and after it is used as documentation for a personnel file.
  - It can be targeted.
  - It can be reciprocal.
  - It can be used to recognize successes as well as areas for improvement.

There are no shortcuts to getting good data.