

Writing Program Guide for Faculty Observations

(October 2021)

Introduction to faculty observations

Teaching observations are required for promotions and contract renewals, but they should also be useful for everyone involved. We heard from instructors that observations have felt *pro forma*: instructors haven't always had a chance to read the observer's report or discuss and reflect on their teaching. Inspired by this feedback and current research on best observation practices, our new process uses observations as an opportunity for discussion and pedagogical growth.

Observation Inventory

The Observation Inventory helps to offer a common vocabulary, reduce observer bias, and inspire informal feedback. It outlines some characteristics of effective teaching that can guide you as an observer and that can be drawn from when you write the letter. It intends to help everyone think broadly about diverse ways of teaching effectively; it is not a comprehensive list. Only you and the observed faculty member see this inventory.

Observation Letter

The formal letter is added to the instructor's WP file and is used to make decisions about faculty contracts and promotion. WP administrators and CAS deans see this letter.

Before the observation:

1) Share the Observation Inventory

- Based on this inventory, the instructor can decide on a day that would be best for an observation of their class. The class should include a substantial amount of student-teacher interaction.

2) Schedule the observation

3) Prepare for the observation

- At least two days before the observation, you should get a copy of the course syllabus, relevant materials, and a lesson plan and/or a list of objectives for the class session.
- (*Optional*) Briefly chat with the instructor to get a better sense of their class and pedagogy:
 - What aspect of the instructor's class or pedagogy are they particularly proud of?
 - How does the instructor create an inclusive and interactive, student-centered classroom ?
 - What concerns does the instructor have or what possible challenges do they see about the class that will be observed?
 - What, if anything, would the instructor like to get some feedback on?

On the day of the observation:

- 1) Arrive to the class at least five minutes early.**
- 2) Choose a seat that gives you a good view of the students and the board.**
- 3) Use the Observation Inventory to take notes.**
 - Keep track of the time spent on each activity to help make the formal letter as specific as possible (e.g., “facilitated a 10-minute discussion of <Topic X> before transitioning to a workshop activity for 20 minutes”).

After the observation:

1) Write the Observation Letter

- Within five days of the observation, write a letter of around 1-2 single-spaced pages in length. Start by listing your name, the instructor’s name, the date and time of the observation, and the number and section of the observed class. The letter can draw on terms from the Observation Inventory and should include a detailed summary of the class activities and interactions. Some questions to address:
 - How was the class structured and what kinds of activities or strategies did the instructor use?
 - What were the highlights of the observed class, e.g., effective presentation of course materials/concepts, engagement with students, and so on?
 - How did the instructor create an inclusive and interactive, student-centered classroom?
 - What key elements of the Writing Program curriculum (metacognition, genre analysis, etc.) appeared in the observed lesson?
 - What could the instructor do more of or do better, and why?

2) Meet with the instructor for ~20 minutes

- Share the Observation Inventory and any other notes you took.
- Have a discussion about this class and the instructor’s pedagogy and teaching goals more broadly.
- Get clarification on any aspect of the class that needs more context for your letter.

3) Revise, share, and submit the Observation Letter

- If needed, revise your letter to add context or details.
- Email the letter to the instructor for their signature; they can also respond to the letter in writing if they’d like to.
- Send the letter and any response from the instructor to Dan Ivey.