

Texas Southern University
College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences
Peer Assessment of Instruction

Objective: To promote improvement of teaching and learning; by establishing a comprehensive peer-driven observation and assessment program for measuring teaching effectiveness.

I. Overview

“Teaching” is multi-dimensional; therefore assessing its effectiveness requires a multi-faceted approach. A single instrument cannot capture all aspects of any individual style or method of teaching. For example, student evaluations can measure whether student perceptions of teachers’ practices are aligned with their objectives, but assessing teaching requires more than student [consumer] perceptions. Consequently, peer observations are useful in providing a supplemental form of teaching assessment, and should be used in conjunction with other methods of assessment.

Derek Bok, former president of Harvard University stated, “We have a great opportunity to lead in reforming education, to engage our students more fully and help them develop to the full extent of their abilities (Harvard Magazine, Jan. 2015).” Focusing on an instructional quality theme which he’d championed for decades, Bok listed three recommended priorities for reforming education:

1. Faculty members should lecture less and experiment with new, more active methods of instruction.
2. The faculty should participate in developing reliable methods of assessing student progress to determine which forms of instruction are most effective in helping students learn.
3. Departments need to help restructure graduate education to acquaint future faculty with what is becoming known about how students learn, what methods of instruction are most successful, and how technology can be used to engage student interest and help them progress.

The College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences “Peer Assessment of Instruction” program (PAI) is designed to provide key evidence towards an ongoing comprehensive evaluation of teaching. As a professional development approach to quality assurance, this peer-driven process focuses on improvement of student learning; while serving as a central source of evidence to evaluating teaching and designing on-going development initiatives. PAI is a *formative* system that provides feedback for professional growth and development. The three-step peer-driven review process consists of two primary activities: *peer observation of in-class teaching* and *peer reviews of the documents used in a lecture*.

II. Professional Development of Faculty

Evaluation of teaching and teacher effectiveness has received renewed attention in higher education institutions¹. Peer observation of teaching has become an important element of assessing faculty members’ instructional skills and competence. It is a tool which provides rich, qualitative evidence for faculty in measuring teaching effectiveness. Third party observations measure classroom processes, teacher/student interactions, and broad overarching aspects of pedagogy, practice and teaching innovation. Measuring effective teaching for the purpose of supporting professional development is more often than not welcomed; yet, measuring for the purpose of rewarding or punishing teachers creates a climate of cynicism, tension and disagreements². As peer reviews of teaching are incorporated into the COPHS practice and culture, and is conducted in a mutually respectful and supportive way, it has the potential to facilitate reflective change and growth for faculty.

III. Formative Assessment of Teaching Using Peer Observation

Formative assessment is “measurement for the purpose of improving”. Peer observations can offer formative feedback to assist in the development of reflective processes of the teacher, while providing qualitative evidence to substantiate student evaluations (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond 2004). It is only one of many ways to provide feedback to faculty on their teaching; however it is highly useful, and it readily complements the practice of teaching assessment which currently relies heavily on consumer feedback from students.

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IV. Procedures

Each semester a team of formally trained peer reviewers are assigned to review twelve randomly selected [online lottery] faculty/lectures [4 from ea. department]. Each faculty will be assigned 2 peer observer(s) [one COPHS faculty peer and one COE faculty peer]. The review team uses a peer-observation rubric which addresses 5 general themes: *course layout and integration, learning outcomes, assessment of learning, resources and materials, and teacher/learner interaction*. Self-reflective discussions and assessments are incorporated throughout the pre and post observer/instructor meetings. Prior student evaluations for selected courses may also be analyzed and used to define focal points for discussions.

The Review Team collaboratively develops and build consensus on the program objective through soliciting faculty buy-in, training subsequent peer reviewers, and facilitating the overall implementation of a multi-step [observer/instructor] process.

- **Step 1 – Pre-Observation Meeting (beginning of semester)** – to review lecture materials, learn about the class climate, and target specific requests of the instructor based on self-assessments and students evaluations (the instructor will provide lecture materials at least 1 week prior to this meeting).
- **Step 2 – Actual Classroom Observation** – a teaching observation instrument will be used as a recording tool.
- **Step 3 – Post-Assessment Meeting (within 2 weeks of first major assessment)** – the instructor will discuss “self-reflective” items pertaining to the lecture with the observer. The observer and instructor will review examination questions and item analysis to discuss student mastery of course material covered during the observation.

V. Faculty Selection Criteria

- Lottery selection amongst all faculty members teaching didactic courses (no electives or labs) spring 2015 semester.
- Four faculty members per department will be selected

Pharmaceutical & Environmental Health Sciences	Pharmacy Practice & Clinical Health Sciences	Pharmacy Administration & Administrative Health Sciences
Faculty/Lecture 1	Faculty/Lecture 1	Faculty/Lecture 1
Faculty/Lecture 2	Faculty/Lecture 2	Faculty/Lecture 2
Faculty/Lecture 3	Faculty/Lecture 3	Faculty/Lecture 3
Faculty/Lecture 4	Faculty/Lecture 4	Faculty/Lecture 4