BOSTON COLLEGE

PEER REVIEW OF TEACHING

The evaluation of courses and instructors by students provides a useful view of the quality of teaching from the consumers’ point of view. Only another faculty member expert in a field and its accepted methods of instruction, however, can judge the design of a course, the adequacy of an instructor’s coverage of the material, and the appropriateness of the course syllabus, assignments, and measurements of student learning. Review of a faculty member’s teaching by his/her peers has two distinct purposes. Formative reviews are intended to develop or improve teaching; summative, or evaluative, reviews are intended for judgments in increment, contract renewal, or promotion processes. Regular conversation among colleagues about teaching should be a hallmark of every department or school’s culture, and formative peer review processes for pre-tenure, non-tenure-track, and tenured faculty should be designed in every department or school to suit that culture. Summative peer-reviews of teaching, on the other hand, are required by the University Statutes for the renewal of contracts of non-tenure-track faculty and for the promotion of tenured and tenure-track faculty, and should adhere to the following University guidelines.

Formative Peer Review of Teaching

- Formative peer reviews of teaching must be an explicit part of each department/school’s mentoring process for pre-tenure faculty.
- Departments and schools are encouraged to devise formal or informal processes to encourage good teaching by tenured and long-term non-tenure-track faculty using formative peer review of teaching.
- The formative review should follow the same guidelines that the department/school uses for summative peer review.
- The faculty member being reviewed should trust and respect the faculty members performing the formative review.
- Small departments should involve faculty from cognate disciplines in their peer review processes.
- The end of the formative peer review process should be a written report, but it should be for the faculty member’s use alone, and form the basis of a conversation between the faculty member and the reviewer(s) about teaching effectiveness.
Summative Peer Review of Teaching

- Every department/school should develop a summative peer review process that is straightforward, manageable, and clearly described in writing.
- The process should be used for the review of:
  - non-tenure-track faculty at the time of contract renewal; in keeping with the Boston College custom of providing long-term non-tenure-track faculty members a year’s notice that their contracts will not be renewed, this review should take place in the year prior to the end of a contract;
  - the third- or fourth-year review of pre-tenure faculty;
  - the review of faculty candidates for tenure, and for promotion both to associate professor and to full professor;
  - the promotion of non-tenure-track faculty.
- Each year, in anticipation of all teaching reviews, the department/school should discuss its “teaching values,” and the learning outcomes it wishes to achieve in courses of various levels.
- Small departments should involve faculty from cognate disciplines in their peer review processes.
- A summative peer review process should include:
  - The selection of two reviewers senior to the faculty member being reviewed, and at least one of whom is tenured;
  - Pre-observation consultation by the reviewers with the faculty member being reviewed about the nature of the course to be observed;
  - Preferably two class visits, not necessarily in the same semester, by each of the reviewers;
  - Evaluation of teaching materials by the reviewers;
  - Written report.
- The written report of the review will become part of the faculty member’s contract renewal or promotion dossier.

Guidelines for a Peer-Review of Teaching

Pre-observation consultation:
To create a context for the observation, the reviewer should look at the instructor’s syllabus, and then ask the following questions of the instructor:
- How does the class I will visit fit into the syllabus?
- What are the goals of the class?
• What happened in the previous class? What have the students done to prepare for the class?
• What methods and strategies will you use in the class?

**The visit:**
The reviewer should arrive early, and sit in an inconspicuous part of the room, if possible.

Reviewers should know the teaching method (lecture, discussion, case study/problem solving, etc.) the instructor employs, and evaluate the instructor’s teaching behavior accordingly. During the class, the reviewer should consider the instructor’s:

• Knowledge of the Subject
• Enthusiasm
• Sensitivity toward students
• Preparation and Organization
• Clarity and Understandableness

**Evaluation of Teaching Materials:**
Reviewers should evaluate course syllabus, readings, distributed material and slides, assignments, examinations, and grading patterns, and judge their:

• Suitability
• Currency
• Alignment with course goals
• Thoroughness
• Creativity

**Written report:**
Each reviewer should write a report that is, to the extent possible, both comprehensive and comparative. In a formative peer evaluation process, the report should be given to, and discussed with, the instructor. In a summative peer evaluation, the written report becomes part of the faculty member’s contract renewal or promotion dossier.

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Suggestions for Further Reading

http://cte.umdnj.edu/career_development/career_peer_review.cfm


Keig, Larry and Waggoner, Michael D. “Collaborative Peer Review. The Role of Faculty in Improving College Teaching.” ERIC Digest, 1995.

Peer Observation and Assessment of Teaching. Institute for Teaching, Learning, and Academic Leadership, University of Albany-SUNY.  
http://www.albany.edu/teachingandlearning/tlr/peer_obs/index.shtml

Peer Review of Teaching. Center for Teaching and Learning, University of Minnesota.  
http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachlearn/resources/peer/index.html

Peer Review of Teaching. Center for Instructional Development and Research, University of Washington.  
http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/consulting/peer-review.html

Peer Review of Teaching. The Teaching Academy, University of Wisconsin-Madison.  
https://tle.wisc.edu/teaching-academy/peer-review-teaching.

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