

Classroom Observation Guidelines

What is Classroom Observation¹?

Classroom Observation is a process by which a CTE consultant sits in on one or more class sessions, records the instructor's teaching practices and student actions, and then meets with the instructor to discuss the observations.

What is the purpose of Classroom Observation ¹?

Classroom Observation allows an instructor to:

- Receive feedback from an objective, experienced observer
- Engage in context-specific discussions about teaching with a CTE consultant

The observation is:

- Confidential
- An objective recording of
 - What the instructor is doing and saying
 - What the students are doing and saying
 - Interactions between the instructor and students
- Tailored to fit the needs of the instructor
- Is used for formative, not summative purposes

The observation is not:

- An endorsement for promotion and tenure
- A judgment of the instructor's teaching techniques, styles and abilities
- A judgment of the instructor's knowledge of disciplinary content

Typical observation format

1. Pre-observation meeting.

The purpose of this meeting is to share information that helps both the instructor and observer prepare for the observation. Information exchanged during this meeting includes the purpose of the observation, course information (including the syllabus), class activities on the days of the observation, what will happen during the observation, and observation follow up opportunities.

2. Observation

Two observations are preferred; the length of time of each observation is determined jointly by the instructor and observer.

3. Observation follow up

Two meetings are usually held between the instructor and observer. A brief, immediate post-observation meeting is held to determine if the instructor felt the class was typical and to relay any immediate concerns of the instructor to the observer. The second meeting is held at a later date. The purpose of this meeting is to review the observation data and plan any follow-up desired by the instructor.

Guidelines for the review of observation data

The discussion about the observation dataⁱⁱ:

1. is descriptive, rather than evaluative
2. focuses on behavior, rather than on the person
3. emphasizes sharing information, rather than giving advice
4. comes in amounts that the receiver can use, rather than everything that could possibly be said
5. is checked to insure clear communication
6. is followed by a plan for follow up.

Additional Information

There are two other forms of 'classroom observation.'

- The CTE can videotape your class. You can view the videotape independently or with guidance from one of our consultants.
- Peer Coaching is technique in which instructors view each others classrooms. You can find information about Peer Coaching here. (link to http://www.vcu.edu/cte/resources/nfrg/13_02_formative_assessment.htm)

ⁱ Adapted from The Center for Instructional Development and Research at the University of Washington. <http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/consulting/observation.html>

ⁱⁱ Adapted from Bergquist & Phillips (1981), *A Handbook for Faculty Development*. New York: Danville Press.