

## Conducting Effective Classroom Observations

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### Workshop Participants Will:

- Reflect on a detailed, ten-step process for conducting effective classroom observations;
- Participate in interactive activities, bolstered by practical information and advice, that will allow them to conduct classroom observations and provide constructive, focused feedback;
- Reflect on Using Rubrics to Conduct Classroom Observations
- Enjoy working with like-minded colleagues.

## Agenda

- Introduction: An overview of peer review, including course goals;
- Ten things to consider when conducting effective classroom observations;
- Providing constructive feedback: An active look at mini-case studies
- Reflection



Teaching is a lifelong art, that ... involves continuous learning not just for the student but for the teacher as well.

—Joseph Katz and Mildred Henry

**A number of scholars believe that peer observation is essential if the evaluation is for instructional improvement.**

—Larry Keig & Michael Waggoner

### Effective Observations Involve a Three-Step Process:

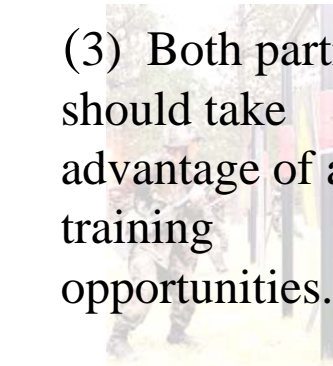
- The Pre-Visit Conference
- The Observation Itself
- The Post-Visit Conference/Debriefing

(1) Classroom observations, regardless of their nature, must be conducted in a *positive* atmosphere.

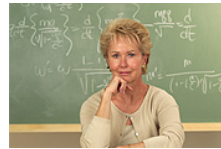


(2) Effective observations are part of a consultation process, not an end product in themselves.

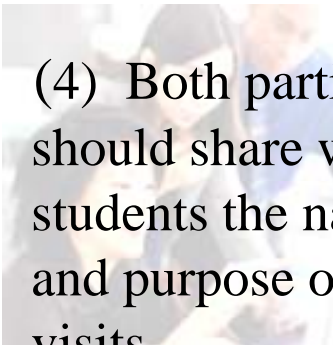
(3) Both parties should take advantage of any training opportunities.



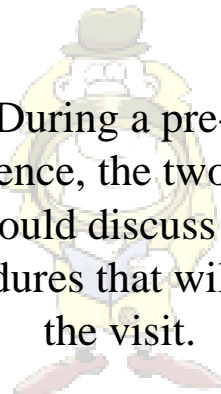
What qualities would you look for in a classroom observer?



(4) Both parties should share with students the nature and purpose of any visits.



(5) During a pre-visit conference, the two parties should discuss the procedures that will focus the visit.





What topics/issues should you discuss beforehand with a teacher you will visit?

### Two Critical Discussion Topics:

- The overall objectives for the course;
- The immediate objectives for the class to be visited.



### Some Other Key Discussion Topics:

- The instrument, if any, to record the visitor's observations;
- The teaching components of particular interest to the faculty member;
- The role the visitor will play during class time;
- The degree to which student input is encouraged;
- The procedures for sharing feedback.



Prior to a visit, the observer should review the course syllabus and other relevant course materials.

(6) In addition to the specific interests identified by the faculty member, the visitor should attempt to capture holistically what occurs in the classroom.

(7) If the results of a visit are recorded, a focused narrative instrument completed after the visit works well.

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**GRAD 701 Graduate Assistant Observation Instrument (Fall 2006)**

Post this reflection to your WebCT account to receive assignment credit. You must conduct two GA classroom observations. Consult the syllabus for details.

Your name:  
Date/Time:  
Course Title/Section:  
GA Observed:  
Location:  
Number of Students Attending:

Rate the value of this observation to your specific teaching, research or grading responsibilities, either now or in the future.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Valuable		Neutral		Very Valuable

Comments:

Rate the value of the feedback discussion to your specific teaching, research or grading responsibilities, either now or in the future.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Valuable		Neutral		Very Valuable

Comments:

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Describe—two to three paragraphs—the nature of the class or lab you observed. What were the objectives? What occurred? What teaching methods did the GA use? Did you observe that the GA established/maintained good rapport with the students?

What new teaching ideas or approaches did you learn?

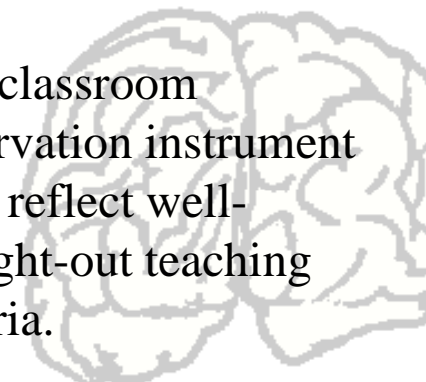
How did this GA use teaching approaches that appealed to different learning styles? How did this GA vary learning approaches?

Describe—two to three paragraphs—the nature of the feedback discussion. What advice or suggestions did you offer the GA? What insights did the GA provide? Did anything surprise you—what and why?

What training or additional instruction would you recommend to enhance your skills and those of other teaching assistants (including yourself)?

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Any classroom observation instrument *must* reflect well-thought-out teaching criteria.



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**Classroom Visit Instrument**  
based on one developed at  
University of Maryland University College

- **Class Data:** Faculty Member; Course and Section; Date; Length of Visit; Place; Visitor; # of Students Present; # of Students Registered.
- **Classroom Description:** Size; Temperature; Layout; Acoustics; Lighting, etc.
- **Style of Presentation:** Use of lecture, group activities, demonstrations, etc; Use of resources such as AV media, whiteboard, handouts, etc.; Use of gestures, eye contact, voice pitch & tone, etc.

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**Classroom Visit Instrument, Cont.**

- Instructor/Student Rapport: Student/faculty involvement & interaction; Questioning Techniques; Guidance of class discussion; openness to suggestions & ideas.
- Syllabus and Other Course Materials
- General Comments

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(8) A post-visit discussion is critically important. Feedback should be:

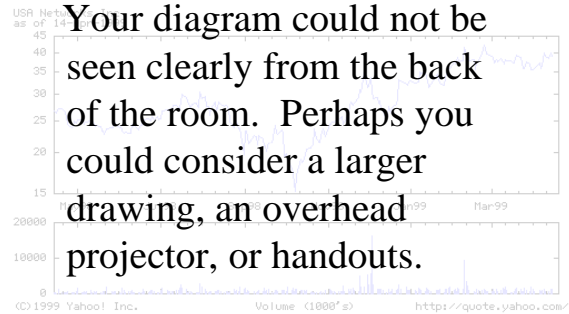
- Accurate
- Honest
- Focused
- Concrete
- Positively Phrased
- Action-oriented



“Excellent rapport exists.”

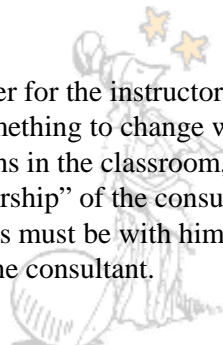
Your students seem to feel comfortable with you and with each other: before class four students crowded around your desk to share articles they had clipped from the paper; during the initial class discussion, over half the people in the room contributed ideas; throughout the lecture, students were nodding and smiling; four students sitting near me planned out-of-class study sessions; eighteen polished apples were neatly aligned on your desk.

Your diagram could not be seen clearly from the back of the room. Perhaps you could consider a larger drawing, an overhead projector, or handouts.



In order for the instructor to actually do something to change what happens in the classroom, the “ownership” of the consultation process must be with him or her, not with the consultant.

—Jody Nyquist & David Taylor-Way



(9) It is helpful to record the teaching improvement activities that emerge from the post-visit discussion.



Teaching Action Plan		
Name:	Course:	
Date:	Section No:	
Suggested Change	Timetable	Record of Action

(10) The two parties should discuss effective ways to integrate the information gleaned through the visit with other teaching data, and they should plan, if possible, follow-up visits to assess and document the teaching enhancements.



### Successful Classroom Observations Generate:

- Reinforcement of positive behavior
- Productive changes in teaching behavior.



### Functions of Feedback

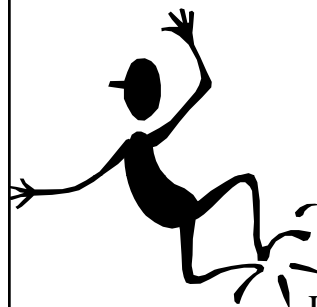
- To Provide a Source of Information
  - About the outcomes of behavior
  - Progress towards a specific goal or standard
  - Impact on relationships with others
- To Provide a Source of Motivation
  - Leave with the energy to improve performance
  - Recognize the value of making changes
  - Believe that changes are under control.

--Lt Col John Micalizza



Knowing and learning are communal acts. They require a continual cycle of discussion, disagreement, and consensus over what has been and what it all means.

—Parker Palmer



# The End!

Happy Observing!