

PEER OBSERVATION OF TEACHING

The evaluation of teaching is commonly used for two purposes. Formative procedures are used to help instructors improve their teaching. Summative procedures, while they may improve teaching, are used primarily in personnel decisions to record an individual's "demonstrated ability as a teacher" (for reappointment; see Faculty Statutes V.B.1) and "continued excellence in teaching" (for tenure and promotion; see Faculty Statutes V.B.3, V.C.2, V.D.1; also FPS 2.II.2 and 15.II.A). Although both should help improve teaching, formative procedures are most effective when kept separate from the summative process.

It is the right and responsibility of all faculty and DPCs in all departments¹ at Hofstra (except the Law faculty) to devise procedures for evaluation of teaching that are fair and flexible and that reflect the specific pedagogical and professional realities of their disciplines. Evaluation of teaching involves consideration of many sources of information, including, but not limited to, course materials (syllabi, tests, etc.), student ratings and classroom observations. In the interest of a useful degree of uniformity and to protect the rights of faculty members, this policy establishes minimum standards for classroom and online course observations. While this policy applies to DPCs, department chairs doing observations should adhere to the relevant parts of this policy.

The University Senate shall re-evaluate the policy and its implementation every five (5) years and report its findings to the University Faculty with a recommendation as to whether the policy should be continued or revised.

I. Formative Modes

Faculty at all levels are encouraged to seek formative consultation and collaboration to improve classroom strategies, teaching techniques, curriculum and syllabus choices, or to address any other pedagogical concerns. Formative procedures may be conducted in various modes including observation in the classroom or evaluation of an online course. Newly hired, untenured faculty, in particular, would benefit from formative procedures during the first year of their teaching at Hofstra. No written record of formative classroom observation shall appear in the faculty member's personnel file. Observers shall maintain strict confidentiality with regard to all aspects of the classroom observation.

II. Summative Procedures

For Summative purposes, departments typically use direct classroom observation by a single observer, but they may adopt any other consistently applied and appropriate mode of observation (e.g., evaluation of a specific module in an online course). For observations of online courses, an observer shall limit the evaluation to a specific module of an online course, as specified by the observee. The observer may not evaluate other modules of the

¹ DPCs are required by the Collective Bargaining Agreement to file copies of their procedures with the AAUP.

online course not specified by the observee. It is generally understood that faculty shall not be observed in courses which are primarily tutorial or involve the supervision of students on an individual basis. In all cases, a written report of each observation and related documents shall be placed in the observee's personnel file. DPCs, ad hoc tenure committees, and chairs shall have access to these reports and documents when making their recommendations on reappointment, promotion and tenure. Recognizing that no single observation can fully reflect an instructor's overall performance or improvement, single observations should be weighed in the context of the overall record of evidence.

III. Frequency of Observation

Faculty should be observed often and early enough before a personnel decision is made to help contribute to a more reliable record of classroom performance. The DPC shall ensure that no faculty member is unduly burdened either as an observer or observee by the number of observations in a given semester. Each department shall determine what constitutes the normal number of observations. Departments should not fall below the following minimum numbers of observations for each instructor without reasonable justification.

A. Full-Time Faculty

1. Normally, untenured faculty should be observed at least once a year throughout their probationary period.
2. Tenured faculty seeking promotion should be observed at least three times throughout the period preceding the promotion decision, with at least one observation in the year of application. (For instructors seeking promotion to assistant professor, that period is normally three to seven years; for assistants seeking associate, six years in rank; and for associates seeking full, six years in rank.)

B. Adjunct Faculty

1. New adjunct faculty should be observed in their first semester. Thereafter, continuing adjuncts (those who have taught at least six semester hours per academic year for at least two of the preceding four academic years, or at least three semester hours per academic year for each of the four preceding years) should be observed at least once every three years.
2. Adjunct faculty seeking promotion should be observed in the semester of application.

IV. The Observer

To avoid potential conflicts of interest, full-time faculty shall be observed only by tenured faculty of higher rank, with the exception that full professors may be observed by tenured full professors. However, any member of an ad hoc tenure committee may observe the candidate. Adjunct faculty must be observed by full-time faculty. Observers are assigned by the DPC normally from among its members; however, any department member eligible for DPC membership is also eligible to observe and may be asked to observe if the observation load in a given semester is otherwise excessive for the DPC. The DPC should make every effort to assign observers who are able to render a fair observation of a given observee. If an observee objects to the assignment of a particular observer, the DPC may assign a different observer.

However, if no reassignment is made, the observee has the right to explain the objection in a written statement to accompany the observation report placed in the observee's personnel file.

V. Observation Protocol

- A. The observer and the observee shall schedule the observation at a time convenient to both. The observee shall have at least one week's notice before an observation, unless he or she agrees to a shorter period of time. Sometime before the observation, the observer and observee shall discuss the goals and expectations for that in-person class or online module.
- B. The observation must be representative of a typical class session (e.g., evaluate an online module covering content that is representative of what would be covered in an in-person class). If the observer cannot observe for the duration of the typical class session, the observer shall inform the observee ahead of time and note the length of the observation in the observation report. In class observations should be done with the least disruption possible. The observer should not intervene during the class, such as asking questions or making remarks. The observee should not ask for the input of the observer in any fashion while the observation is being conducted.
- C. The peer observation report is to be composed of the following components:
 1. Description of the content and form of the class as it was observed
 2. Assessment of the following:
 - Mastery of the material presented in light of the current state of knowledge in the discipline (accuracy of presented material, awareness of current trends and developments, etc.).
 - Classroom management (prompt start, pacing, atmosphere conducive to learning, classroom control, etc., or online course structure and organization).
 - The appropriateness of the material presented in light of the stated purpose of the course (as stated in Hofstra University's Bulletins and the objectives of the class).
 - The effectiveness of the form of presentation (lecture, discussion, combination teaching techniques, use of technology and other auxiliary materials).
 - Clarity of presentation and effectiveness of communications skills.
 - Encouragement and management of classroom or online participation.
 - Responsiveness of instructor to students (questions and comments and other contributions).
 - Overall assessment of the class or online module.

Each department and/or school/college shall adopt written guidelines for peer observation which adhere to the guidelines set forth in this Policy. The format may differ from department to department and may include rating scales, closed end questions, narratives or a combination of such.

Classroom teaching by library faculty will be evaluated in accordance with the above guidelines.

- D. A draft of the report shall be given to the observee within ten working days of the observation, and the observer and the observee shall discuss the report to resolve any misunderstandings of fact. The observer shall submit the final written evaluation to the DPC, with copies to the observee and the department chair, no more than ten working days after the post-observation discussion.

Observations by ad hoc tenure committee members or members of the DPC considering a promotion are not exempt from this provision.

VI. Appeal

If the observee is convinced that the observation report is unfair, inaccurate, or reflective of an unusually unrepresentative teaching performance, he or she may pursue one or more of the following options.

- A. Submit a written response to the observation report to be attached to and filed with the report.
- B. Request a second observation by a different observer to be added to the record.
- C. For cases not involving tenure or promotion, the following shall apply: Upon written request from the observee for a review of the observation, the DPC shall create an ad hoc Appeals Committee to consider removing the observation report from the file. The Committee shall consist of three full-time members of higher rank in the department or adjacent departments, eligible to serve on a DPC. The Appeals Committee should be appointed by the DPC in consultation with the observee; for example, the observee may be asked to pick from a list of eight candidates chosen by the DPC. The observee and the observer(s) may either appear before or submit written statements to the Appeals Committee to explain their positions. All previous observations and evaluations of the observee shall be made available to the Appeals Committee; the Committee may also, if it deems necessary, perform its own observation of the faculty member. If the Appeals Committee finds sufficient evidence that the observation is unfair, inaccurate, or reflective of an unrepresentative teaching performance, it shall direct that the report be removed from the file.
- D. In cases of tenure and promotion, the existing appeals process (FPB, UAB) shall apply.