Faculty Perspectives on UW PRT

Interview Findings from Faculty Participants

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2026-07-30

Executive Summary

Early findings from faculty who participated in the 2025 UW PRT soft launch indicate that participants experienced the process as credible, fair, manageable, and professionally meaningful. Participants valued the structured opportunities for reflection, actionable feedback, and collegial dialogue, and many reported changes to their teaching practice. Positive experiences were closely linked to core design features, including transparent expectations, a shared framework, reviewer preparation, and cross-unit review. These findings provide early evidence of how UW PRT is being experienced in practice and what may be important to preserve as participation expands.

Finding	Strategic Significance
Faculty acceptance may be less of a barrier than anticipated	UW PRT is earning faculty confidence and delivering meaningful value.
Cross-unit review works	Cross-unit matching offers a scalable institutional model that expands capacity while supporting fairness, objectivity, and reduced concerns about departmental dynamics.
Reviewer development will be critical	Reviewer development as an institutional safeguard for maintaining credible, consistent, and constructive reviews as participation grows.
Implementation should remain responsive to participant feedback	Participant feedback as a mechanism for continuously improving UW PRT while sustaining faculty trust and participation.

Faculty Voices

Positive Participant Experience	Teaching Development & Reflection	Credibility, Fairness & Trust
“I would definitely do it again.”	*“It actually changed my course outline for the next term. That doesn’t usually happen from feedback.”*	*“The pre-review meeting made things very transparent. It didn't feel like a daunting sort of test or anything like that.”*

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Introduction

Purpose of the Report

This report documents and analyzes faculty experiences during the UW PRT soft launch. The focus is on understanding how participants experienced the process and identifying themes that emerged across interviews.

Background and Context

Peer Review of Teaching (PRT) is one component of the University's broader approach to teaching assessment. The UW PRT model was developed through faculty governance processes and introduced through a soft launch intended to support implementation while gathering feedback about participant experiences.

The soft launch began in 2025 as an initial implementation phase. Participation during this period was optional for reviewees. Reviewers were identified by participating units and completed training offered in partnership between the Centre for Teaching Excellence (now ITSU) and Teaching Assessment Processes (TAP).

Any PRT reports produced during the soft launch were treated as confidential to the reviewee. Reviewees determined whether and how a soft-launch report would be shared for the purposes of teaching assessment.

Following the initial launch period, the Provost extended the soft launch to support broader participation and continued learning as implementation evolved.

Methods

Purpose and Design

This report draws on qualitative interview data collected as part of a formative evaluation of the UW PRT process. The purpose of the interviews was exploratory: to understand how participants experienced the PRT process in practice, with particular attention to perceived value, credibility, fairness, feasibility, and the use of cross-unit reviewers.

Interviews were designed to surface participants' lived experiences rather than to assess compliance or evaluate individual performance. As such, the focus was on how UW PRT was experienced in practice and how those experiences informed perceptions of what supports effective and sustainable peer review of teaching.

Participants

Participants were selected based on direct 2025 involvement in the UW PRT process as either reviewers or reviewees. A total of 11 participants volunteered to take part in the interviews. Participants represented a mix of roles and career stages, including instructors who had been reviewed, instructors who had served as reviewers, and individuals with leadership or teaching development roles.

Nine participants were from the Faculty of Arts, which had implemented the UW PRT model as designed. Two participants were from the Faculty of Environment, which had adopted selected elements of the model.

While the sample is not intended to be statistically representative of the institution, it provides insight into how participating faculty experienced the PRT process during the soft launch.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted following participants' completion of a PRT cycle. Interview questions explored:

- preparation for and experience of the UW PRT process;
- perceptions of feedback quality and usefulness;
- experiences related to trust, credibility, and fairness;
- experiences with cross-unit reviewers;
- time investment, workload, and feasibility; and
- experiences with the systems and processes used to support UW PRT.

Interviews emphasized personal reflections and narrative descriptions, allowing participants to elaborate on aspects of the process they found most meaningful, challenging, or instructive. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Analytical Approach

Interview transcripts were analyzed using an iterative thematic analysis approach. Initial coding focused on identifying recurring patterns related to participants' experiences of the UW PRT process, with particular attention to observations, experiences, and concerns raised across multiple interviews.

As the analysis progressed, codes were refined and grouped into broader themes reflecting shared experiences across participants. These themes form the basis of the findings presented in this report, including:

- teaching development and reflection;
- credibility, fairness, and trust;
- experiences with cross-unit reviewers; and
- feasibility and workload.

Analysis was intentionally grounded in participants' own language and examples to ensure that findings reflected how the UW PRT process was experienced in practice rather than how it was intended to function in theory.

Scope, Limitations, and Interpretation of Findings

This report draws on interview data from a small, purposively selected group of faculty who participated in the UW PRT process in 2025, the first year of the soft launch. Findings should therefore be interpreted as exploratory and descriptive rather than representative of all faculty experiences with peer review of teaching at the University of Waterloo.

The participant group reflects experiences from two Faculties that participated in UW PRT in 2025. As such, the findings do not capture experiences from all Faculties or all approaches currently being used to support peer review of teaching across the institution.

Finally, interview data reflect participants' self-reported experiences and perceptions of the UW PRT process. While individual perspectives varied, the consistency of several themes across interviews strengthens confidence in the findings presented.

Findings by Theme

Theme 1: Experiences from a Partially Aligned Implementation Context

Interviews with participants from a faculty that had adopted selected elements of the UW PRT model provided insight into how PRT was experienced in that context. Participants described highly collegial and pedagogically meaningful review experiences, alongside greater reliance on local coordination, informal processes, and individual workarounds.

Reviewer matching and scheduling were often managed through direct outreach rather than through the institutional PRT system, with reports circulated locally and retained outside the system. As one reviewer explained:

> *"Most of it ran without the system… a Chair or someone would reach out to me, and I would just set it up" (Reviewer).*

Participants also described relying on locally developed or adapted documentation to support the review process. While these approaches appeared to function effectively within the local context, participants described processes that operated largely outside institutional systems. One reviewer noted:

> *"I haven't used any of the documents or anything on the system just because I had already had kind of my, you know, document that I fill out, but it's the document came from [another Faculty] […] So it's not that I'm going completely rogue with my forms or anything" (Reviewer).*

Several participants indicated that these local approaches were manageable within the context of a small faculty and could be supported through existing relationships and administrative coordination. As one reviewer explained:

> *"So yeah, the system we haven't really utilized that much, but we're also a very small faculty. So it's very manageable for me in my position to kind of do the running of the who needs review and stuff like that" (Reviewer).*

Participants also described limitations associated with local administration of reviews, particularly in relation to institutional record-keeping and visibility into completed reviews. One reviewer observed:

> *"Because there might be people that I did that didn't end up listed on the system, so their reports weren't on the system. If there's no report uploaded, the system doesn't know they had a review."*

Participants further reflected on how reviewer relationships shaped feedback conversations. While internal reviews were generally described as collegial and supportive, one reviewer suggested that familiarity within a department could make it more difficult to engage directly with persistent teaching challenges:

> *[...] "Our reviews so far have been very collegial, very supportive and positive and try to give constructive feedback, actionable feedback that they can take and modify and change, but... I don't think it gets at the root of some teaching problems that we know instructors are having" (Reviewer).*

Overall, participants from this context described positive experiences with peer review of teaching and emphasized the collegial and developmental nature of the process. Their accounts also highlighted the ways in which local coordination, informal processes, and faculty-specific practices shaped how PRT was experienced and administered.

Theme 2: Teaching Development and Reflection

Reflection, Self-Assessment, and Change

Across interviews, participants consistently described the UW PRT process as creating structured, intentional space for reflection on their teaching, particularly on why and how they teach the way they do, not simply what they teach. The pre-observation materials and initial framing conversations were repeatedly cited as pivotal moments that shifted attention away from course content and toward teaching goals, student experience, and pedagogical purpose.

Rather than functioning as a compliance-oriented exercise, participants described the process as prompting them to articulate instructional intentions that often remain implicit in day-to-day teaching. Several participants emphasized that preparing for peer observation - selecting a class, articulating goals, and situating instructional choices - encouraged deeper self-assessment and greater clarity about teaching priorities, particularly in relation to student engagement, inclusion, and learning experiences.

As one reviewee explained:

> *"It made me focus really hard on what I was trying to do in this class, not just the content, but confidence, community, and engagement of the students." (Reviewee)*

Another participant described how the process contributed to a more explicit understanding of the Framework for Teaching Effectiveness:

> *"Maybe what changed is that now I have the framework (FTE) more explicitly in my mind when I'm thinking about my lectures and designing them. Before it was implicit, now it's explicit." (Reviewee)*

Several participants noted that this reflective focus differed from other forms of teaching assessment they had previously experienced. Rather than retrospectively justifying teaching decisions, participants described being encouraged to consider alignment between course design, instructional strategies, and intended learning outcomes in advance. For some, this created a greater sense of comfort with ongoing growth and development as educators. One participant reflected:

> *"Just feeling OK with knowing that I still have lots to learn, that was actually an important outcome for me." (Reviewee)*

Constructive, Actionable Feedback to Inform Change

Participants consistently characterized the feedback they received through UW PRT as specific, actionable, and grounded in teaching practice. In contrast to more generalized forms of feedback, peer reviewers were described as providing concrete observations and practical suggestions that instructors could apply directly to their teaching.

As one reviewee explained:

> *"She had really concrete suggestions, not abstract critique. Things I could try immediately." (Reviewee)*

Participants described feedback that informed changes such as:

- adjustments to pacing and wait-time for student responses;
- new approaches to participation and engagement in large or online classes;
- revisions to course structure, materials density, and assessment design; and
- changes to how classroom space, whether physical or virtual, was used.

Several participants reported that they had already implemented changes or planned to do so in future course offerings. As one reviewee observed:

> *"It actually changed my course outline for the next term. That doesn't usually happen from feedback." (Reviewee)*

Participants described feedback as most valuable when it combined direct observation with practical suggestions for improvement. Several also noted that observations prompting self-awareness were experienced as constructive rather than judgmental when delivered within a collegial and supportive process. One participant explained:

> *"The reviewer engaged fully with the process, observing the class, carefully noting both strengths and areas for improvement, and providing generous, constructive, and candid feedback. While some observations made me immediately self aware, they were delivered in a supportive way and grounded in a strong understanding of online teaching and effective pedagogical practice. The reviewer offered concrete, practical suggestions..." (Reviewee)*

Across interviews, participants described reviewer feedback as collegial and supportive rather than corrective or punitive. This sense of trust appeared to be an important condition supporting receptiveness to feedback and willingness to consider changes to teaching practice.

Where participants explicitly compared UW PRT with other forms of teaching assessment, they described peer review as offering a distinct perspective on teaching practice. Participants highlighted the value of contextualized observations, professional judgment grounded in teaching expertise, and feedback that could inform both teaching development and assessment-related documentation. Participants described peer review as providing:

- contextualized interpretation of teaching practice;
- language that could be used in performance, promotion, or tenure materials; and
- a developmental orientation focused on improvement.

Several participants also emphasized that peer feedback carried particular weight because it came from colleagues trained to observe teaching through a shared framework. As one reviewee explained:

> *"It was really helpful to have another metric... something I could point to that actually speaks to teaching, not just student ratings."*

Another participant noted:

> *"If someone who actually does your job and knows what's involved has an opinion, that carries more weight than student evaluations." (Reviewee)*

Overall, participants described UW PRT as contributing opportunities for reflection, professional dialogue, and actionable feedback that supported teaching development.

Theme 3: Credibility, Fairness, and Trust

Credibility Through Shared Standards and Deliberate Structure

Participants consistently linked the credibility of the UW PRT process to its clear structure, shared framework, and grounding in recognized principles of effective teaching, particularly the Framework for Teaching Effectiveness. Rather than perceiving the framework as prescriptive or restrictive, participants described it as providing a useful structure for discussing teaching and focusing attention on pedagogically meaningful dimensions of practice.

Several interviewees emphasized that the framework allowed reviewers and reviewees to focus on aspects of teaching most relevant to a particular course, rather than attempting to address every possible element of teaching practice. Participants generally described this flexibility as contributing to the credibility and usefulness of the process. As one reviewee explained:

> *"The report was structured around those categories, design, implementation, learning experience, and that made sense. It wasn't arbitrary." (Reviewee)*

Another participant reflected:

> *"The process was very well defined, and the reviewer was extremely effective to work with. The post-observation conversation and report walkthrough were particularly valuable, and I left with clear feedback. While implementing some of the recommendations will take thought, I did not encounter anything problematic in the process. I would definitely do it again." (Reviewee)*

Across interviews, participants described the combination of shared expectations, structured processes, and a common framework as contributing to confidence in the review process.

Trust in Reviewers

Trust emerged as a central condition shaping perceptions of fairness and legitimacy. Across interviews, both reviewers and reviewees emphasized the importance of establishing trust early in the process, particularly through pre-observation conversations and evidence of reviewer preparation. Participants consistently described trust as being influenced by three interrelated factors:

- early pre-observation conversations;
- reviewers' evident preparation and engagement; and
- the collegial tone of feedback.

One reviewee described how early interactions helped establish confidence in the reviewer:

> *"When we met before the visit, I could tell she understood the process and understood teaching. That made everything else feel easy." (Reviewee)*

Participants also emphasized that feedback was experienced as supportive without being superficial. As one reviewer noted:

> *"Feedback was generous, but it was also honest. That balance mattered." (Reviewer)*

Across interviews, trust appeared to support participants' willingness to engage with feedback and view the process as fair and professionally grounded.

Transparency of Criteria

Transparency was repeatedly identified as an important feature of the UW PRT process. Participants described valuing clarity regarding what aspects of teaching would be observed, how observations would be framed, and how they would ultimately be represented in written reports. Several participants noted that transparency reduced uncertainty and contributed to confidence in the process. One reviewee explained:

> *"Colleagues of mine in the department who had been through a peer review had nothing but really kind of overwhelmingly positive things to say about the experience and so… The pre-review meeting made things very transparent. It didn't feel like a daunting sort of test or anything like that. It really felt like it was part of an overall effort to sort of enhance the quality of my teaching." (Reviewee)*

Participants generally described transparency as helping them understand expectations and supporting confidence in the fairness of the process.

Academic Legitimacy

Participants frequently described UW PRT as aligning with broader academic norms of peer review, professional dialogue, and continuous improvement. Many participants viewed the process as academically legitimate because it involved informed peer judgment grounded in teaching expertise.

Participants described value in receiving feedback from colleagues who understood the complexities of teaching and who had been prepared to observe teaching through a shared framework. Several participants emphasized that peer review provided a perspective on teaching that differed from other forms of feedback because it was informed by direct observation and professional expertise.

Across interviews, participants described peer review as a collegial process that supported professional dialogue about teaching. Participants frequently connected the legitimacy of the process to informed peer judgment, shared expectations, and opportunities to engage in meaningful conversations about teaching practice.

Theme 4: Experiences with Cross-unit Reviewers

Initial Uncertainty with Cross-unit Reviewers

Participants described initial uncertainty about the use of cross-unit reviewers. Concerns often centred on whether reviewers from outside a reviewee's disciplinary area would have sufficient context to provide meaningful feedback on teaching. Several participants noted that these concerns reflected assumptions they had held prior to participating in the process.

While participants recognized the importance of disciplinary expertise in some aspects of teaching, many indicated that their perspectives shifted after experiencing the review process directly.

Reframing Through Practice

Across interviews, participants generally described experiences with cross-unit reviewers as positive. Several participants reported that concerns about disciplinary distance diminished once they engaged in the review process and received feedback. One participant reflected:

> *"I am so grateful that it was no one in my department. I think having someone with a different perspective but still say in the general humanities or a social science prof or something like that […] when you give someone who is adjacent the opportunity to provide feedback… You get richer feedback. I think disciplines tend to have certain paths in which they deliver information and collect assessments, etc. And to have someone who sees it quite differently is a positive." (Reviewee)*

Participants also noted that reviewers from adjacent or different disciplines were able to engage meaningfully with dimensions of teaching such as learning environment, inclusivity, clarity, and student engagement. Several suggested that this perspective encouraged attention to broader aspects of teaching effectiveness rather than discipline-specific approaches to content delivery. As one participant explained:

> *"What I prioritize most in my teaching are accessibility, equity, creating safer spaces, and ensuring students feel included. For the dimensions of teaching that matter most to me, it didn't really matter whether the reviewer was from English, Physics, or Psychology. I felt that someone from outside my discipline could assess the learning environment and classroom space effectively, without getting bogged down in finer-grained disciplinary details." (Reviewee)*

Reduced Anxiety and Increased Openness

Participants also described relational benefits associated with cross-unit review. Several reported feeling more comfortable receiving feedback from someone outside their home department because the review was less connected to existing workplace relationships and departmental dynamics. As one participant explained:

> *"There was something comforting about it not being someone from my department. It felt less political." (Reviewee)*

Another participant noted:

> *"There was something about not knowing the person that was comforting. I think I would have been more nervous or on edge if it was someone that I'm going to be seeing for the next 30 years in my department." (Reviewee)*

Participants suggested that this distance supported openness to feedback and reduced concerns about interpersonal dynamics or departmental politics. Several described cross-unit review as creating conditions for candid and productive conversations about teaching.

Synthesis

Across interviews, participants generally described experiences with cross-unit reviewers as positive. Many participants reported that cross-unit review reduced concerns about departmental politics, supported openness to feedback, and encouraged attention to broader dimensions of teaching effectiveness. Participants frequently described disciplinary distance not as a barrier to meaningful review, but as a feature that helped focus attention on teaching practices, learning environments, and student experiences.

Theme 5: Feasibility and Workload

Time Expectations vs. Reality

Participants consistently described the UW PRT process as manageable and proportionate. While the process required focused attention and engagement, participants generally did not describe it as excessively burdensome or difficult to integrate into existing academic responsibilities.

Where challenges were noted, participants typically attributed them to the realities of academic workloads rather than to the design of the PRT process itself. As one reviewer explained:

> *"People are busy, that's the real constraint. Not the process itself."*

Several participants emphasized that the time invested felt reasonable given the depth and usefulness of the feedback received. Unlike some evaluative activities that were described as procedural or administrative, participants frequently characterized PRT as meaningful and worthwhile.

Design Features Supporting Feasibility

Participants identified several features of the UW PRT process that supported feasibility within existing workloads. These included:

- flexibility in scheduling observations and meetings;
- a bounded scope that focused attention on selected aspects of teaching; and

- system reminders that supported completion of process milestones.

Participants generally described system communications as supportive rather than disruptive. One reviewer noted:

> *"The reminders were helpful, not intrusive. I needed them."*

Several participants also described the PRT platform and associated workflows as functioning smoothly and unobtrusively. As one reviewee explained:

> *"It worked well enough that I didn't really notice it, which is probably a good thing."*

Participants frequently suggested that the absence of unnecessary administrative burden contributed to the overall feasibility of the process.

Perceived Value Relative to Effort

Participants generally evaluated the time required for PRT in relation to the value they received from the experience. Many described the feedback, reflection, and professional dialogue generated through the process as making the investment worthwhile.

One reviewee reflected:

> *"If we're doing this just for quantity, then we might as well not do it. What made this worthwhile was the depth of feedback I received and the real strategies for improvement."*

Several participants contrasted PRT with evaluative activities they perceived as offering less direct benefit to teaching practice. In contrast, participants often described PRT as a meaningful use of time because it generated actionable feedback, opportunities for reflection, and professional conversations about teaching.

Participant Perspectives on Feasibility

Across interviews, participants generally described UW PRT as feasible within existing academic workloads. The process was viewed as requiring time and attention, but participants frequently characterized that investment as worthwhile because of the reflection, feedback, and professional dialogue it generated.

Participants often described the process as structured without being rigid and substantive without being burdensome. Many emphasized that the value gained from the experience justified the time required to participate.

Suggestions for Improvement

Participants identified relatively few concerns about the process. The most common suggestion related to the timing of the review cycle. Several participants suggested aligning the cycle more closely with the academic year so that a broader range of teaching activity could be considered within a single review period.

Some participants also noted that expanding the pool of trained reviewers could help distribute responsibilities more broadly as participation increases.

Discussion

Across interviews, participants consistently described UW PRT as credible, fair, developmentally meaningful, and feasible. Participants frequently linked these experiences to transparent expectations, structured opportunities for reflection, reviewer preparation, and collegial dialogue. Participants described the process not simply as an evaluative activity, but as an opportunity to reflect on teaching practice, receive actionable feedback, and engage in professional conversations about teaching.

Participants also described positive experiences with cross-unit reviewers. While concerns about reviewers from outside a reviewee's home department emerged in some interviews, many participants reported that cross-unit reviewers contributed to perceptions of fairness, reduced concerns about departmental politics, and supported productive feedback conversations. Participants often described disciplinary distance not as a barrier to meaningful review, but as a feature that helped focus attention on teaching practices, learning environments, and student experiences.

Across the five themes, participants consistently described the value of processes that supported transparency, trust, and constructive dialogue. Experiences of reflection, feedback, credibility, and feasibility were often discussed together rather than as separate aspects of the process. Participants frequently linked positive experiences to opportunities for structured reflection, actionable feedback, and collegial engagement with teaching.

Conclusion

Interviews with faculty who participated in UW PRT in2025, the first year of the soft launch, suggest that participants generally experienced the process as credible, fair, manageable, and professionally meaningful. Participants described opportunities for reflection, constructive feedback, and collegial dialogue, and many reported that the process contributed to changes in their teaching practice.

Participants also linked positive experiences to features such as transparency, shared expectations, reviewer preparation, and cross-unit review. While findings should be interpreted in light of the study's limited and non-representative sample, they provide valuable insight into how faculty are experiencing the UW PRT process.