UW PRT: 2025 Insights

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Executive Summary

Analysis of 22 PRT Reports generated in 2025 through the University of Waterloo Peer Review of Teaching (UW PRT) process found the following:

Finding	Strategic Significance
Framework for Teaching Effectiveness is being used consistently.	A shared understanding teaching effectiveness is meaningful in PRT.
Reports consistently reflect a developmental orientation.	PRT can be a meaningful tool for ongoing teaching development.
Reports identify both strengths and opportunities for growth.	PRT provides a balanced and useful picture of teaching effectiveness.
Reports demonstrate consistency across contexts.	Common expectations make PRT work across diverse UW teaching contexts.
Reviewers vary in how explicitly they used specific examples and evidence to support observations about teaching effectiveness.	Stronger evidence use would increase the transparency and usefulness of PRT reports.

Recommendations

Compare UW PRT and Faculty-based PRT Reports

- Compare UW PRT reports with reports from non-participating Faculties to assess whether the identified strengths are distinctive to the UW PRT approach.

Strengthen Reviewer Development

- Strengthen training and guidance on the use of concrete examples, evidence-informed observations, and constructive developmental feedback.

Use Evidence to Guide Ongoing Improvement

- Use findings from this analysis and future comparative analysis to guide ongoing refinement and future implementation of UW PRT.

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Introduction

In 2025, participating Faculties joined the soft launch of the University of Waterloo's Peer Review of Teaching (UW PRT) process. This analysis of 22 reports generated through UW PRT was undertaken to understand how reports documented teaching effectiveness, communicated developmental feedback, and addressed longstanding concerns regarding the quality and usefulness of peer review reports generated through "legacy" peer review of teaching processes. Specifically, the analysis focused on:

1. What strengths are evident in reports generated through UW PRT?
    a. To what extent do the reports demonstrate meaningful developmental feedback and provide useful documentation of teaching effectiveness?
2. What weaknesses/opportunities for improvement are evident in the reports?

Table 1: Legacy PRT Concerns & Emerging UW PRT Observations

Peer Review of Teaching Challenge	**Evidence from the 2025 Analysis**
Variation in what reviewers attend to	UW PRT focuses on common institutional framework
Reliance on individual conceptions of effective teaching	Reviewers generally used common Framework for Teaching Effectiveness language and concepts
Difficulty establishing common expectations across disciplines and contexts	Reports demonstrated a common approach despite variation in disciplines, teaching contexts, and reviewers
Reviews seen as compliance-based 'check-box' exercises	Developmental opportunities appeared in all reports
Feedback focuses only on strengths	Reports identified opportunities for growth
Inconsistent documentation of evidence supporting reviewer observations	Variation remains; enhancements to reviewer training needed

Methodology

The total sample included 22 PRT reports generated through the UW PRT process. Reports were analyzed using an iterative qualitative content analysis approach. Initial line-by-line coding was conducted to identify patterns within and across reports, with

codes and categories refined throughout the analytic process. Findings represent patterns recurring across multiple reports rather than isolated observations. The coding framework focused on the extent to which reports reflected alignment with the Framework for Teaching Effectiveness (Framework), supported instructor development, incorporated evidence-informed observations, and provided information relevant to academic decision-making. Through iterative review and comparison across reports, categories were refined and organized into broader themes related to report strengths and weaknesses. Importantly, this analysis focused on the content of UW PRT reports. As such, findings relate to documented reporting practices and do not capture all aspects of the UW PRT process (e.g., faculty experiences, pre and post meetings etc.). Additional insight into participant experiences is reported in *Faculty Perspectives on UW PRT* (available at https://uwaterloo.ca/associate-vice-president-academic/reports-uw-community).

Confidentiality and Reporting Approach

Participation in the soft launch of the UW PRT process is voluntary, and reviewees retain discretion over any evaluative use of their PRT reports. Given the small number of participants and the potentially identifiable nature of report content, findings are reported only in aggregate form. To protect the anonymity of participants and maintain the developmental intent of the soft launch, this report does not include direct quotations or excerpts from individual PRT reports. Instead, the analysis focuses on recurring patterns, themes, and observations identified across reports. This approach supports meaningful analysis of report quality, consistency, and usefulness while protecting participant identity.

Findings

The analysis revealed three key themes related to report quality, outlined in Table 2. Each of these key themes is described in detail in the sections that follow.

Table 2: Summary of Key Findings

Key Theme	Finding	Description
Alignment with Framework for Teaching Effectiveness	Consistently observed	Reports consistently used the Framework for Teaching Effectiveness to structure observations and discuss teaching practice.
Developmental Orientation	Consistently observed	Reports consistently emphasized reflection, growth, and teaching improvement, although the depth of developmental feedback varied.
Use of Examples to Support Observations	Variability observed	Reports differed in the extent to which reviewers drew on specific observations and examples to illustrate and support observations.

Finding 1: Alignment with the Framework for Teaching Effectiveness

Analyzed reports demonstrated consistent alignment with the Framework. Reviewers routinely organized observations and comments using the three key priority areas of design, implementation, and learning experience. This finding was evident in the content of all 22 reports, and in the overall structure of these reports, with reviewers drawing on similar categories and organizational approaches to document their observations.

The Framework provided reviewers with a shared language for discussing teaching practice. As opposed to relying primarily on personal preferences or individual conceptions of effective teaching, reviewers generally framed their observations in relation to common indicators of teaching effectiveness as defined in policy. As a result, reports demonstrated a notable degree of consistency in how teaching practices were described, analyzed, and discussed.

The consistency observed across reports is particularly noteworthy given the diversity of disciplines, teaching contexts, and reviewers participating in the soft launch. While the depth of analysis varied between reports, reviewers' reflections generally focused on similar aspects of teaching practice and evaluating them through a common institutional lens. This suggests that the Framework is functioning as intended: creating a shared foundation for interpreting and discussing teaching effectiveness across diverse teaching contexts.

The findings further suggest the UW PRT process may support greater consistency in peer review reports by establishing common expectations regarding what aspects of teaching *should be observed, documented, and reflected upon*.

Finding 2: Developmental Orientation

Reviewers consistently adopted a developmental approach to peer review. Rather than focusing exclusively on documenting teaching strengths, reviewers routinely identified opportunities for growth and enhancement of teaching practice.

Developmental feedback was not limited to a single aspect of teaching. Opportunities for growth were identified across Framework dimensions. Regardless of discipline or teaching context, reviewers generally approached feedback in a supportive and collegial manner, emphasizing reflection, continuous improvement, and future development.

Developmental opportunities were identified in all 22 reports and included the following:

- assessment design and alignment in course design principles
- student engagement and participation
- course organization and sequencing
- integration of learning activities and course materials
- use of instructional technologies
- learning environment and classroom practices

While the specificity and depth of recommendations varied across reports, opportunities for growth were routinely included alongside identified strengths. In many cases, reviewers framed suggestions as possibilities for enhancement or further exploration rather than inadequacies requiring development.

Balancing Collegiality and Critique

Reviewers consistently approached peer review as a collegial process designed to support reflection and ongoing improvement rather than to identify weaknesses in teaching practice. However, the ways in which reviewers enacted this developmental approach varied considerably. Some reports paired supportive feedback with clear commentary, identifying limitations, tensions, or areas requiring further attention. Others emphasized affirmation and encouragement, with recommendations presented largely as opportunities for future growth rather than as responses to identified limitations. As a result, reports differed in the degree to which they provided critical insight alongside developmental feedback.

This variation may reflect differences in reviewers' comfort or experience with providing constructive-critical feedback while maintaining the developmental intentions of peer review. However, it may also be influenced by the voluntary nature of participation in the soft launch; it is possible this influenced the range and complexity of teaching concerns identified within reports. As implementation continues and participation expands, reviewer training should focus not only on maintaining a developmental tone but also on helping reviewers provide appropriately challenging, evidence-informed feedback within that tone.

Finding 3: Variability in Use of Examples to Support Observations

While reports demonstrated consistent alignment with the Framework and a developmental approach to peer review, variation was evident in the extent to which reviewers supported their observations and feedback with specific examples from their observations. All reports documented teaching practices and identified opportunities for continued growth; however, some reviewers provided more detailed examples to illustrate the basis for their observations and recommendations.

In reports where reviewers incorporated concrete examples from classroom observations, the connection between observed practices, identified strengths, and developmental feedback was readily apparent. Other reports communicated observations in more general terms, making the evidentiary basis for conclusions less visible to readers.

This variation has implications for the transparency and utility of peer review reports. Greater use of specific examples and supporting evidence can strengthen reviewers' ability to clearly communicate how observations informed their conclusions and developmental recommendations, thereby enhancing the value of peer review for both instructor growth and academic decision-making.

Illustrative Characteristics of Greater Use of Examples to Support Observations

The extent to which reviewers made the basis for their feedback explicit varied considerable across reports. At one end of the continuum, reports provided feedback with limited supporting evidence or explanation. At the other, reports clearly connected feedback to specific observed examples, explained the significance of those examples, and linked their feedback to strengths and opportunities for growth. In some cases, feedback was further connected to developmental implications or recommendations for continued development. Examples of more and less developed feedback are provided below.

More developed feedback

Feedback → Example(s) → Developmental implication

These reports connected feedback to specific examples from observed teaching, making it clear how the reviewer arrived at their conclusions and how particular areas for growth were identified.

Less developed feedback

Feedback → Limited or no supporting evidence → Broad suggestion

These reports included feedback but provided fewer examples from observed teaching. Consequently, it was less clear how the suggestions arose from the observed teaching, or how suggestions for growth were identified.

Discussion & Recommendations

Reports consistently used the Framework effectively across diverse disciplines, teaching contexts, and reviewers, supporting a shared institutional approach to describing and evaluating teaching effectiveness.

However, reports varied in how clearly reviewers used specific examples and evidence to support observations and developmental feedback. This suggests that future improvements should focus on strengthening reviewer practice, particularly evidence use and constructive feedback, rather than substantially redesigning the UW PRT process.

Because the 2025 analysis involved a limited, self-selected participant pool, these findings cannot establish whether the observed characteristics are distinctive to UW PRT. Comparing UW PRT reports with faculty-specific PRT reports would provide a stronger basis for assessing the process and informing future implementation.

Recommendation 1: Comparative analysis of PRT reports

Obtain access to reports from non-participating Faculties for confidential, aggregate comparison.

Recommendation 2: Reviewer development and support

Strengthen reviewer development and guidance related to the use of concrete examples, evidence-informed observations, and constructive developmental feedback.

Recommendation 3: Inform future implementation through ongoing evaluation

Use findings from soft launch, together with the comparative analysis, to inform future decisions regarding institution-wide implementation and ongoing refinement of the process.