

# Classroom Observation Guidelines

## Engineering Teaching Development Committee

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### Introduction

The attached template for documenting a classroom observation provides a framework for recording the context of the class including room facilities, student seating, and lesson set up, and key events during the class along with observer comments or questions.

The initial experiences of members of the Engineering Teaching Development Committee (ETDC) suggest that a universal template for summarizing feedback from classroom observations is not apt to be widely useful and that each observer will work out a summarization process that suits both their style and their needs. That said, these same initial experiences suggest that there are some common principles that guide the effective summarization of a classroom observation. The guidelines below have been developed based upon these principles and may be helpful when forming feedback to be delivered to the instructor during a debriefing session or in formal written feedback.

### Guidelines

1. Identify the purpose of the classroom observation and the resulting feedback. Presently in Engineering, classroom observations are used for a variety of purposes:
  - a. Evaluative
    - i. Hiring: Tenure Track
      - assessing teaching potential and commitment
      - provides an opportunity to indicate importance of our educational mandate
      - can allow for initial formative feedback
    - ii. Hiring: Sessional
      - ensuring minimum thresholds for classroom presentation skills
      - provides initial formative feedback
    - iii. Tenure and Promotion
      - commenting on strengths and contributions in class activities associated with the course (note that other components of course delivery including course design, assessment methods, use of learning activities, etc. should also be considered)
  - b. Developmental
    - i. Initial tenure track faculty (or equivalent)
      - supporting the growth and development of newer instructors through formative feedback on teaching (and other aspects of course design and delivery)
    - ii. Established Faculty Members

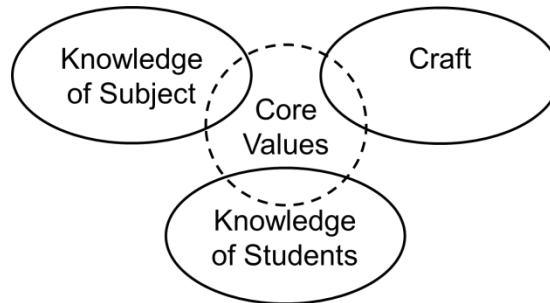
- similar to that for initial tenure track faculty, but may be more focused on a specific issue or aspect of delivery as appropriate
    - iii. Reciprocal (Peer-to-Peer) Development
      - Opportunity for observed instructor to reflect on and discuss teaching with peer observer
      - Opportunity for the observer to reflect upon their own teaching approach through observing a peer's class and discussing with the peer
    - iv. Teaching Team Development
      - Opportunity for course co-teachers to reflect on and discuss teaching with other team members
      - Opportunity for course co-teachers to identify and implement teaching synergies
2. Identify a theoretical framework for teaching development that will provide structure and theoretical grounding to the feedback.
- a. The Centre for Teaching Excellence (CTE) provides reviews for:
    - i. Mentoring, <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/professional-development/enhancing-your-teaching/faculty-mentoring> ; and
    - ii. Peer Review of Teaching, <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/professional-development/reviewing-teaching/peer-review-teaching> ,
  - b. Another model, used by Gordon Stublely, Associate Dean of Teaching, categorizes the main areas of growth that a new teacher can expect:
    - i. Knowledge of Subject
      - Connections to foundation and advanced concepts
      - Threshold concepts
      - Connections to applications and professional practice
      - Connections to wider discipline and other disciplines
    - ii. Craft
      - Blackboard/slideware principles and mechanics
      - Classroom management
      - Critical Points: first class, pre-test/midterm discussion, post-test/midterm discussion
      - Instructional team management
      - Reflective and feedback mechanisms
    - iii. Knowledge of Students
      - Common misconceptions
      - Motivations to learn
      - Working foundation knowledge
      - Model of learning – developmental, integrative, requires effort
      - Fostering communication

#### iv. Core Values

These views of the nature of learning, students, and engineering work tend to evolving relatively slowly compared to the new teacher's growth in knowledge of subject, knowledge of students, and craft. Examples of core values that influence teaching and learning include:

- Views on Individual responsibility; and
- Views on intrinsic personal motivation

The following picture summarizes this model:



3. Emphasize positive features and in developing planned next steps, try to build from existing positive features. This guideline recognizes that the best teaching occurs when the teacher is working in a manner that is consistent with their values and personal strengths.

The approach for giving feedback used in sports coaching has many useful features for providing feedback in mentoring contexts<sup>1</sup>.

- a. Provide observations of positive aspects of class;
- b. Clarify context of the class if necessary;
- c. Have instructor comment on their perceptions of student engagement and learning;
- d. Provide constructive criticism on one aspect of the class that might have worked better;
- e. Provide opportunity for instructor to comment and ask questions; and
- f. Wrap up with a discussion on next steps and close with a final positive compliment.

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<sup>1</sup> This structure was provided by David Wang (ECE) and an example session following this structure is provided in the example templates.