A guide to formal peer review of teaching at UOW

… an additional option that academics can use for professional development or evaluation

What is peer review of teaching?
Peer review of teaching occurs whenever it is agreed that a colleague will provide feedback on teaching. It offers a valuable opportunity for both reviewer and reviewee to reflect on teaching.

Peer review need not be formal. For example, colleagues may sit in on each other’s classes or a Head or Associate Dean (Teaching & Learning) may offer to observe a new staff member.

Formal peer review is offered at UOW as an additional option to assist any academic to:
- develop their teaching, and/or
- collect evidence for probation, promotion or award applications.

Formal peer review requires the use of UOW processes.

Why peer review?
Evaluation of teaching is ideally based on a range of perspectives, including:
- student evaluation
- peer evaluation and/or scholarly evaluation (publications about teaching)
- supervisor evaluation
- self evaluation.

Is peer review required at UOW?
No. Peer review of teaching at UOW is optional. No probations or promotions applicant will be disadvantaged for their decision not to participate in peer review of teaching.

Peer review is just one source of evidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning outcomes</th>
<th>Peers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Student grasp of concepts</td>
<td>• Peer observation of teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Student work</td>
<td>• Peer review of curriculum development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Marks/grades</td>
<td>• Other feedback and discussions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Student reaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Teaching philosophy</td>
<td>• Evaluation of teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reflection</td>
<td>• Informal feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Responsiveness</td>
<td>Adapted from C D Smith, 2008 (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What kinds of teaching activity can be reviewed?
Any teaching activity can be peer reviewed including face-to-face teaching, online teaching, clinical and field-based teaching, course and subject design and resource design.

What types of formal peer review are available?

**Peer observation of teaching**
Peer observation can be arranged for any teaching activity at UOW.

**Peer review of curriculum development**
Peer review of curriculum development will be available in the future, extending the current use by Academic Services Division academics.

### Peer Review of Teaching

**Teaching academics might use this when:**
- seeking feedback and constructive suggestions to develop as a teacher
- a group of colleagues wishes to encourage an environment of mutual support and feedback, as part of ongoing reflection on teaching practice
- completing Unit 2 of the University Learning and Teaching course.

**Peer review of teaching refers to an arrangement between colleagues.**

### Formal Peer Review of Teaching

**Teaching academics might use this when:**
- collecting evidence for a probation or promotion application
- collecting evidence for a teaching award

**and when:**
- seeking feedback and constructive suggestions to develop as a teacher.

**Formal peer review of teaching is carried out under formal UOW processes.**

All forms of peer review of teaching are encouraged at UOW. Many academics are already familiar with peer review processes through the University Learning and Teaching (ULT) course.
What is the process for formal peer observation of teaching?
Before requesting a peer observation, attendance at a UOW workshop on peer review of teaching is highly recommended.

1. Reviewee selects reviewers from UOW list (one internal and one external to faculty) and contacts reviewers to request a review

2. Reviewer and reviewee meet and discuss teaching context and pro forma reviewee has selected
   The peer observation request form is signed

3. Reviewers observe classes at agreed times and places and record notes on agreed pro forma

4. Reviewers type reports using the pro forma, including positive comments, areas for improvement and constructive suggestions. Reviewers lodge reports with CEDIR for possible use in probation/promotion

5. Each reviewer meets with reviewee to discuss feedback and provides copy of report to reviewee

6. Optional: for probation or promotion, reviewee decides on two reports to be sent to the Committee. Reviewee writes reflective commentary on all evidence of teaching

7. Peer reviews if requested are sent to Committee with teacher evaluations and ULT completion report

Either person may decline or withdraw at any point in the process.

Step 1 – Choosing & contacting reviewers

Choosing reviewers
Only the academic to be reviewed can select the reviewers. Reviewers must be chosen from a list of accredited UOW peer reviewers. One must be internal to the teacher’s faculty and one external to the teacher’s faculty.

Selection is based on the teacher’s perception that the reviewers:
• have considerable teaching expertise and the ability to share this with others
• will be able to give honest, constructive feedback
• are helpful and positive
• will be fair and impartial
• can be trusted to keep confidentiality.

Contacting reviewers
Academics contact their reviewers directly, usually by email, to ask if they are available to carry out a formal UOW peer review of teaching.

It is possible that the first choice of reviewer may not be available. Reviewers are entitled to decline, for example if they are too busy, or for any other reason don’t wish to take part.

UOW peer reviewees and reviewers

What are the qualities of reviewees?
Reviewees can be any UOW teacher who actively seeks out ideas to improve their teaching. They are able to hear open and honest feedback while staying positive about themselves. They take responsibility for deciding which comments are useful.

What are the qualities of reviewers?
Peer reviewers of teaching are members of the UOW community who have been selected by Deans. They have the following achievements and qualities:
• teaching achievements in the Faculty
• formal UOW recognition for teaching achievements, eg teaching roles, grants or awards
• teaching expertise and judgment
• commitment to maintain confidentiality
• sensitivity to the different contexts and career needs of others

• ability to maintain an open and friendly approach, focussed on the other person’s journey rather than their own expertise
• ability to give honest feedback in constructive and positive ways.

How are reviewers accredited?
Accreditation for peer observation of teaching is gained through attending a two-hour workshop on formal peer observation of teaching, followed by a peer observation exercise. Academics who have previously completed Unit 2 of the University Learning and Teaching Course are exempt from the exercise.

What do reviewers gain?
Acting as a peer reviewer is a formal UOW teaching leadership role, and could be cited as evidence in teaching award or promotion applications.

Most reviewers comment that they enjoy the experience of discussing teaching with a colleague, and pick up some good ideas for their own teaching by observing others.
Step 2 – The pre-observation meeting

Prior to the meeting
• The reviewee reflects on what they wish to gain from the review and chooses questions from the UOW pro forma, which can be up to two pages when completed. Questions may be omitted and/or added.

What happens at the meeting?
• Discuss the teaching context. This could include the teaching philosophy and approach, student backgrounds and motivation, whether the subject is team taught, etc.
• Discuss the context of the class to be observed. This could include what the teacher is aiming to achieve for the students, the learning resources to be used, and/or any concepts students may find difficult.
• If the reviewer is from another faculty, a discussion about how students learn in the particular discipline would be useful.
• Discuss the aims of the peer observation. These may be fairly general, or the teacher may ask for specific feedback.
• Discuss the pro forma questions chosen by the reviewee. You can both agree that some may be marked “not applicable”.
• The reviewer signs a request form and returns it to the reviewee.

Reviewee returns the form
After a pre-observation meeting with each reviewer, the reviewee sends CEDIR the completed Peer Observation Request Forms.

Step 3 – The observation

What does the reviewee do?
• Explain that a visitor is in the room for staff development purposes. This is particularly important in small classes where the extra person is likely to be noticed by students.
• Conduct the class as usual.

What does the reviewer do?
• Be unobtrusive.
• Observe the students as well as the teacher. It may be useful to try to think of yourself as a student to ‘get a feel’ for the learning environment.
• Take notes as needed.

Step 4 – The report

Writing the report
Responsibilities of the reviewer:
• Type up notes as soon as possible, using the pro forma agreed in the pre-review meeting.
• Include some contextual notes. Even brief notes, such as ‘students from a mix of faculties’ can speak volumes on the challenges involved.
• Aim for an honest appraisal of strengths and weaknesses.
• Write in a way that is both tactful and constructive.
• For each area for improvement, offer a practical idea.
• Reports must not exceed two pages.
• The report must be lodged with CEDIR within two weeks of the observation.

Some other points to bear in mind:
• There are many teaching styles; what works for you may not work for someone else.
• Consider the level of appointment. A new associate lecturer may not have the confidence of a professor.
• If there are numerous possible areas for improvement, focus on those which will make the most difference to students.
• Your report needs to be clear when read by others, as the reviewee may decide to use the review as formal evidence of teaching.

Lodging the report
BEFORE showing the report to the teacher, the reviewer sends a signed copy of the report to CEDIR. This is the official copy, which the teacher may choose to use later in a promotion or probation application.

The report is sent to CEDIR prior to any discussion so that there is no suggestion that the reviewer collaborated with the reviewee or changed the report under pressure. Reviewees who use reports in probation/promotion can clarify points in their reflection statement.

Ensuring confidentiality
• Only the person to be reviewed can request a peer review of teaching.
• Peer reviewers must sign a clause that says they will not discuss the review with others.
• Results of peer reviews are confidential to the teacher reviewed and are only released to others on the teacher’s request.
• Review reports are stored securely at CEDIR, as with teacher evaluations.
• Reviewees may ask for a report to be withdrawn from the record.
Step 5 – Reviewee receives feedback

The reviewer takes a copy of the report to the teacher and offers to discuss the results.

In the post-review meeting:

• Begin with the teacher talking about their perceptions of the teaching experience, how well the aims of the class were met, etc.
• The reviewer discusses their observations, both the positives and the areas for possible improvement.
• Together, the reviewee and reviewer explore ideas the teacher might try in the future.

The usefulness of peer review of teaching as a staff development tool depends largely on the feedback stage. Both reviewer and reviewee will benefit from a full discussion of their perceptions of the teaching session.

After the meeting, the teacher reflects on the feedback and how it may help their teaching.

Two weeks after the observation, CEDIR sends a formal copy of the report to the reviewee.

Can peer reviews be substituted for student surveys?

Generally, no. In some limited circumstances, formal peer reviews of teaching may provide a substitute for student surveys. This can be negotiated if an academic has teaching responsibilities but has no classes (or too few classes) in which to collect surveys. Currently this applies to Academic Services Division and some Graduate School of Medicine academics.

People in other areas who, because of the nature of their role, genuinely can’t carry out sufficient surveys may apply to their Dean and the Chair of the Promotions or Probations Committee to substitute peer reviews. It should be noted that the existing option to extend probation for employees who, through no fault of their own, have been unable to obtain the sufficient number of surveys, remains unchanged.

Please note: having left it too late to organise surveys is not a valid reason to substitute peer reviews.

Is formal peer review data valid?

All forms of evaluation have strengths and weaknesses. To achieve a credible form of evidence, UOW peer review has these features:

• reviewers who are recognised for their teaching expertise and judgment
• reviewers are trained
• reviewee and reviewer clarify aims and context before the observation
• UOW pro formas are provided
• peer reviews of teaching are not considered alone, but together with a range of evidence
• either person may decline or withdraw at any point in the process, eg if felt that a valid report may not result
• a reviewee who believes a report isn’t credible can choose not to put it forward.

Step 6 – Using reports in applications

How do I include peer reviews in my probation/promotion application?

Probation applicants, from Spring 2008, may:

• Select two peer review reports they wish to include. One reviewer must be internal to their faculty and one external to their faculty.
• Write about the results as part of the reflection statement on all teaching evidence. This is an opportunity to clarify any points.
• Contact CEDIR and ask for the reports they have selected to be sent to the committee.

From 2009, promotion applicants will also be able to use peer review of teaching reports.

Step 7 – Committee receives reports

On the teacher’s request, CEDIR forwards the following documents to the committee:

• selected teacher evaluations (four to six)
• selected peer reviews of teaching (two — one internal and one external to faculty)
• ULT completion report.

How will the committee interpret peer review information?

The committee will consider the peer review reports together with all the evidence supplied. They will weigh up student surveys, teaching achievements, peer reviews, the reflection statement, referee reports and other evidence.

For more information

Request forms and a list of reviewers can be obtained from Julie Sikora, CEDIR, x 4369 cedir@uow.edu.au
To discuss peer review of teaching at UOW, please contact Maureen Bell x 3946 mbell@uow.edu.au