



A Professional Development Program
for Graduate Students and Postdoctoral Fellows
Offered by the Teaching Resource Center

Faculty/Peer Classroom Observation & Discussion: Information

Before the observation

Once you have identified the instructor, contact him or her, preferably in person, and arrange the observation. When you contact the instructor, be sure to tell him or her why you would like to observe the class, what you hope to learn, and how the follow up discussion will be structured.

For example, you might begin by explaining that you are participating in the TPT program, that you would like to observe this class because--you anticipate teaching a similar course one day, you've heard wonderful things about this instructor's teaching method, you would like to observe how the instructor explains a difficult theoretical concept, etc.. Be sure to clarify what you hope to gain from the observation [e.g., the instructor's insights on teaching] and to schedule a time for a follow-up discussion. You might also clarify whether the instructor prefers to introduce you and/or mention the reason for the observation or not.

When scheduling the post-observation meeting, consider offering to take the instructor to lunch using monies from the TPT lunch fund (see "Lunch Fund") to set a congenial tone for the discussion and to make it clear that you are observing the instructor's choices, not evaluating his/her teaching performance.

During the observation

Keep the following points in mind as you conduct your classroom observation: 1) arrive early, 2) find an unobtrusive vantage point in the room, 3) arrive with an open-mind and a curiosity about other instructors' teaching styles and choices, 4) focus on the on the way the material is presented, why it's presented the way it is, and the effect these decisions have on student learning rather than the material itself, and 5) keep detailed notes.

Use the questions below to guide your observations:

- In what pedagogical style is the class conducted, e.g. lecture, discussion, etc.?
- What role does the instructor take during class - information giver, moderator, resource person, etc.? How does his/her role influence the dynamics of the class?
- How is the class period organized and how does the organization affect the presentation of the material?
- What types of questions does the instructor ask during class: knowledge-based, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, or evaluation? How does the type of question affect the students' responses?
- In what way(s) does the instructor:
 - begin and end the class period? How does this influence the current class period and set-up the next one?
 - shift between lecture, presentation, discussion or questioning modes?
 - interact with students?
 - elicit responses/questions from students?
 - follow up student questions or comments?
 - react to silence after asking a question or soliciting a response from the students?
 - respond when not knowing the answer to a question?
 - approach teaching a difficult topic or confusing point?
 - involve the students throughout the class? How do the students react to the different techniques?
 - change the pace of the class?
 - challenge students to think beyond the class itself?

- provide immediate feedback opportunities to the students?
- encourage students to take ownership of their learning?

After the observation

The follow-up discussion is your opportunity to learn some of the whys and hows of teaching from the instructor you observed. Consider, too, inviting the faculty member to observe one of your own classes, if you are comfortable doing so, particularly if you will need a recommendation letter from someone who has observed your teaching at a later point. Remember that the post-observation discussion should be **descriptive** rather than evaluative--a time to **share information** rather than to give advice. You might ask the instructor any of the questions below, or come up with similar ones of your own, to help you shape the discussion in a positive and mutually beneficial manner:

- How did you think the class went? What did you think worked very well in this class?
- Was this a typical class? How was it the same? How was it different? What made this class different from others you have taught?
- If you could teach the same class again, what would you do differently? What would you do the same way?
- I noticed that you [describe strategy, e.g., called students by name, moved all around the classroom, lectured from your notes, etc.]. Why did you choose this strategy? Did the students respond as you had expected? Were you satisfied with the student response?
- Why did you [lecture, lead a discussion, start with a quiz, etc.]? In what ways do you think this format re-enforces the material?
- What were your objectives in doing [describe strategy]? Did you feel that you were successful in meeting these objectives? Why or why not?
- What kinds of technologies do you find effective in teaching?
- How do you gauge students' understanding of the material? How do you give feedback to students in class?
- How do you encourage critical thinking in your students?
- What ways of manipulating physical space in the classroom do you find effective?
- What did you learn from teaching this class?