

# College of Agricultural and Life Sciences

## Peer Teaching Assessment Procedures

### **Introduction:**

The goal of the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences' Peer Teaching Assessment is to enhance a faculty member's instructional performance. This process is just one method to improve teaching performance. Faculty members are strongly encouraged to request informal peer teaching assessments from colleagues and from mentor committees on a regular basis. The following sections of this procedural document detail the peer teaching assessment process, instructions on how to use the *Peer Teaching Assessment Form*, and suggestions on integrating external reviewers to assess instructors' course content in the tenure and promotion process.

### **The Objectives of the Peer Teaching Assessment:**

1. Promote improvement of instructor performance and effectiveness through a holistic assessment process.
2. Provide feedback to the instructor, based on a variety of performance criteria, which can be used to improve teaching and learning.
3. Encourage instructional innovation and self-reflection.

### **Assessment Process and Procedures:**

1. **Peer Teaching Assessment Procedures:** A copy of the peer teaching assessment procedures should be provided to every faculty member who has a teaching appointment, as part of the hiring process. The peer teaching assessment process includes the development of a Teaching Portfolio and a peer teaching assessment committee. The department chair is responsible for providing the procedures to newly hired and current faculty.
2. **Teaching Portfolio:** The faculty member (referred to as "instructor" throughout this document) develops a Teaching Portfolio of materials and documents that characterizes the scope and quality of the teaching effort and includes a teaching philosophy statement, course syllabus, study guides, handouts, and other items developed for use in teaching the course(s) being assessed. *Note that this Teaching Portfolio is distinct from the "Educational Portfolio" in the UF tenure and promotion packet, which encompasses evidence of impact and achievement of the instructor's educational goals and materials from the instructor's teaching program.* Please refer to the current CALS Guidelines for preparing the Teaching Section of the UF Tenure and Promotion Packet for details on the "Educational Portfolio."
3. **Formation and Composition of the Peer Teaching Assessment Committee:** The chair, the center director (for those at Research and Education Centers), and the instructor being assessed will collaboratively seek out committee members during the semester prior to when the peer teaching assessment will take place. The committee should consist of at least three members. It is recommended that at least one member of the instructor's mentoring committee who has an interest in teaching serve on the peer teaching assessment committee. The department chair should request that one of the committee members serve as chair of the peer teaching assessment committee. It is also recommended that at least one of the committee members be from outside the department of the instructor being assessed. After the instructor has been assessed once, subsequent peer teaching assessment committees

could be comprised of the initial committee members. At least one committee member from an earlier committee should serve on a subsequent committee.

4. **Role of the Peer Teaching Assessment Committee:** The role of the peer teaching assessment committee is to assess classroom and/or online instruction. Committee make-up and assessment procedures are the same for tenure-track and non-tenure-track teaching faculty. Committee members assess the instructor in a given academic semester, and provide a verbal debrief and input on an action plan for instructional improvements. For third-year progress assessment and tenure and promotion reviews, a formal assessment report is developed by the committee, in addition to the verbal debrief and action plan that are provided at other assessments.

Because several courses are team-taught, it is recommended that every instructor in a team-taught course be assessed at the same time, by the same committee. It may not be practical to evaluate all instructors in a team taught course of more than two instructors.

5. **Timeframe for Peer Teaching Assessments:** This peer assessment process emphasizes assessing an instructor's overall teaching program, one course at a time. Graduate and undergraduate courses – if an instructor teaches at both levels – should be assessed. This may mean that multiple courses at the undergraduate or graduate levels would be assessed over an instructor's teaching career but not necessarily in the same semester.
  - a. **New (non-tenured) tenure-track faculty:** For new tenure-track faculty, peer teaching assessments should be completed at least twice (one undergraduate and one graduate course, if the instructor teaches at both levels, or two undergraduate or two graduate courses if the instructor teaches at only one level) before the instructor's third-year progress assessment and once prior to the instructor submitting his/her tenure and promotion packet.
  - b. **Tenured faculty:** For tenured faculty, a minimum of two peer teaching assessments (one undergraduate and one graduate course, if the instructor teaches at both levels, or two undergraduate or two graduate courses if the instructor teaches at only one level) should be completed within each seven year period after being tenured.
  - c. **Non-tenure-track faculty:** For lecturers and other non-tenure-track teaching faculty, a minimum of two peer teaching assessments (one undergraduate and one graduate course, if the instructor teaches at both levels, or two undergraduate or two graduate courses if the instructor teaches at only one level) should be completed within each five year period.

6. **Peer Teaching Assessment Committee Timeline:**

- a. **Initial Meeting:** The peer teaching assessment committee should meet with the instructor prior to the start of the semester when the course is being assessed. During, if not before, this first meeting, the instructor should provide the committee with the Teaching Portfolio (teaching philosophy, syllabus, example exams, handouts, and other course-related materials). For online courses, it is also recommended that the committee meet in some fashion, by teleconference or by videoconference if necessary, with the instructor providing the committee with the Teaching Portfolio and access to the online course. At this initial meeting, the instructor should share his/her teaching philosophy and previous action plans, and suggest to the committee

members some aspects of the course that the instructor would like them to focus on or analyze while they assess the course over the semester.

- b. **During the Semester of the Assessment:** During the semester when the course is delivered, each committee member should visit the classroom at least twice or, for distance-delivered courses, access at least two online modules. Committee members provide a summary of their observations and suggestions from the Peer Teaching Assessment Form to the committee chair (See *Peer Teaching Assessment Instructions* for more detail on the actual observation process.)

**After the Course is Completed:** The committee chair compiles the committee members' comments into a written summary that is shared with the instructor at a verbal debrief. This brief written summary of the committee members' observations and recommendations should be provided to the instructor and to the department chair and center director, if applicable, after the verbal debrief is conducted. With input from the committee, the instructor creates an action plan to help improve teaching performance. The action plan should be shared with the department chair and center director, if applicable.

For peer teaching assessments that occur immediately prior to an instructor being considered for third-year progress assessment or tenure or promotion, an assessment report from the committee also must be completed. The report will be included in an instructor's third-year progress assessment or tenure or promotion materials.

## 7. Assessment Reporting:

- a. **Verbal Debrief:** The verbal debrief is an opportunity to provide feedback to instructors on ways they could enhance their courses in a non-threatening format. Discussion should focus on observations from the Peer Teaching Assessment Form. It is expected that during the verbal debrief, committee members will provide their insights on what they observed and suggestions on improvements. The written summary of committee observations and recommendations should be provided to the instructor at this time.
- b. **Action Plan:** The instructor creates an action plan to enhance and improve teaching methods, with input from the committee. Subsequent peer assessments should refer to the action plan to consider how the instructor has implemented suggestions for improvement, and make note if the instructor has made progress on areas that had been identified previously as needing improvement.
- c. **Reporting Peer Teaching Assessments for Third-Year Progress Assessment and for Tenure and Promotion:** For third-year progress assessment, tenure and promotion, an assessment report should provide aggregate comments from the committee members of what they observed that the instructor did well and areas that could be improved. Prior peer teaching assessments and action plans should be referenced in this report. The reviewers should base observations for the report from the *Peer Teaching Assessment Form*, using the same major headings:
  - i. Course Organization and Instructor Preparation

- ii. Course Goals, Objectives, and Activities
- iii. Learning Environment

The assessment report, along with a brief narrative from the instructor on how the instructor used the assessment(s) and action plan(s) should be included in the packet for third-year progress assessment, tenure and promotion.

8. **Content Assessment:** Although not part of the formal peer teaching assessment process, it is strongly recommended that the external reviewers selected to review an instructor's tenure and promotion packet be provided with links to the instructor's syllabuses so the reviewers can assess the instructor's course content and relevance, based on the syllabuses provided. A description of this external course content assessment is provided in the section titled ***Suggested Procedures for External Course Content Assessment.***

# Peer Teaching Assessment Instructions

Peer observation is important for improving teaching and assessing teaching effectiveness. This set of peer teaching assessment instructions and the ***Peer Teaching Assessment Form*** for recording observations and suggestions are provided to assist peer teaching assessment committee members in conducting assessments of instructors in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences. Assessments should be based on observing the instructor in face-to-face courses or in online courses, and focused on educational methods, rather than specifically on the course content. Course content review should be handled at the department level. (A separate course content assessment is recommended during the tenure and promotion process, as outlined in the section titled ***Suggested Procedures for External Course Content Assessment.***)

The peer teaching assessment should be based on a thorough examination of the faculty member's syllabus, classroom or online presentations, laboratory or online exercises, assignments, exams, and supporting materials. Each peer teaching assessment committee member should attend at least two class meetings/lectures; for online courses, individual peer committee members should review at least two online modules or lessons.

The ***Peer Teaching Assessment Form*** encompasses assessment of three key course components:

- 1) Course organization and instructor preparation
- 2) Course goals, objectives, and activities
- 3) Learning environment

While all three components should be assessed for all courses, some specific assessment elements may not be appropriate for a specific course. The reviewer should use the ***Peer Teaching Assessment Form*** to record observations and provide suggestions for improvement, where appropriate. The following outline lists the criteria that should be considered in the course assessment.

## Section 1: Course Organization and Instructor Preparation

- Topics covered in the course are presented in a logical progression in the syllabus.
- All written instructions are clear, well-organized, and easy to understand on course materials (syllabus, assignments, and assessments).
- A description of how the instructor provides feedback to students is included in course materials.
- Assessment criteria are clear, the grading system is well defined, and grading scale values are explained in the syllabus.
- The syllabus meets all CALS and UF requirements and is posted online.

## Section 2: Course Goals, Objectives, and Activities

- Course goals and objectives in the syllabus are clearly stated and measurable.
- Course goals and objectives in the syllabus are appropriate to the course level.

- Expectations for student performance in the syllabus and in course assignments are clearly defined.
- Assignments draw on course content and are designed to build student knowledge and skills.
- Course activities and content help students develop critical thinking skills and achieve appropriate levels of cognitive achievement.

### Section 3: Learning Environment

- The instructor provides opportunities for dialogue/interaction between students and the instructor.
- The instructor provides opportunities for students to be actively engaged in the learning process through methods such as exercises, questioning, student presentations, discussions, and interactive activities.
- The instructor provides opportunities for students to interact with other students through such methods as group projects, discussions, and peer review.
- The instructor uses a range of teaching activities and techniques to address differences in student learning styles, drawing on those that are appropriate to course content. These may include readings, lectures, student projects, audio-visual materials, and various forms of student interactions.
- The instructor displays verbal and non-verbal behaviors that bring the instructor and students closer together (see website for examples of teacher immediacy behaviors).

# Peer Teaching Assessment Form

Instructor's name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Course number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Course title: \_\_\_\_\_  
Reviewer's name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date(s) of course observation: \_\_\_\_\_

## Section 1: Course Organization and Instructor Preparation

Meet with the course instructor to gain insights and information about the course that will assist you with the assessment. Review the course syllabus, assignments, required and recommended readings, and course assessments.

- Topics covered in the course are presented in a logical progression in the syllabus.
  - General Observations:
  - Suggestions for Improvement:
- All written instructions are clear, well-organized, and easy to understand on course materials (syllabus, assignments, and assessments).
  - General Observations:
  - Suggestions for Improvement:
- A description of how the instructor provides feedback to students is included in course materials.
  - General Observations:
  - Suggestions for Improvement:
- Assessment criteria are clear, the grading system is well defined, and grading point values are explained in the syllabus.
  - General Observations:
  - Suggestions for Improvement:

## Section 2: Course Goals, Objectives, and Activities

Meet with the course instructor to gain insights and information about the course that will assist you with the assessment. Review the course syllabus, assignments, required and recommended readings, and course assessments.

- Course goals and objectives in the syllabus are clearly stated and measurable.
  - General Observations:
  - Suggestions for Improvement:
- Course goals and objectives in the syllabus are appropriate to the course level.
  - General Observations:
  - Suggestions for Improvement:

- Expectations for student performance in the syllabus and in course assignments are clearly defined.
  - General Observations:
  - Suggestions for Improvement:
- Assignments draw on course content and are designed to build student knowledge and skills.
  - General Observations:
  - Suggestions for Improvement:
- Course activities and content help students develop critical thinking skills and achieve appropriate levels of cognitive achievement.
  - General Observations:
  - Suggestions for Improvement:

### **Section 3: Learning Environment**

Observe the classroom at least two times or review at least two online modules/content sections to complete this section of the assessment. Meet with the instructor prior to attending the class for a face-to-face course to determine the times to observe which best reflect the range of activities and teaching styles utilized in the course.

- The instructor provides opportunities for dialogue/interaction between students and the instructor.
  - General Observations:
  - Suggestions for Improvement:
- The instructor provides opportunities for students to be actively engaged in the learning process through methods such as exercises, questioning, student presentations, discussions, and interactive activities.
  - General Observations:
  - Suggestions for Improvement:
- The instructor provides opportunities for students to interact with other students through methods such as group projects, discussions, and peer review.
  - General Observations:
  - Suggestions for Improvement:
- The instructor uses a range of teaching activities and techniques to address differences in student learning styles, drawing on those that are appropriate to course content. These may include readings, lectures, student projects, audio-visual materials, and various forms of student interactions.
  - General Observations:
  - Suggestions for Improvement:
- The instructor displays verbal and non-verbal behaviors that bring the instructor and students closer together (see website for examples of teacher immediacy behaviors).
  - General Observations:
  - Suggestions for Improvement:



# Suggested Procedures for External Course Content Assessment

## **Introduction:**

Although not part of the formal peer teaching assessment process, it is strongly recommended that external reviewers assess an instructor's course content as part of the tenure and promotion process. The tenure and promotion external reviewers should be provided with links to the instructor's online syllabuses of undergraduate and graduate courses, in order to assess the instructor's course content and relevance, based on the syllabuses provided. The external reviewers' comments regarding the instructor's course content should be integrated into the tenure and promotion letters written by the external reviewers.

## **Purpose of External Review of Course Content:**

The overall goal of the external course content assessment is to enhance course content. The external reviewers examine and, when appropriate, make suggestions for improving the currency, completeness, relevancy, and accuracy of the material covered in the course, including textbooks, topics covered, and sequencing of topics, based on the information provided in the syllabus (topics, readings, audio-visual presentations, and other sources of information for the student).

## **Rationale for External Review:**

Given the specialized nature of much of what faculty members teach in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, internal reviewers often do not have the subject-matter expertise needed to provide in-depth review of specialized course content. External reviewers who are experts in the subject matter under review can be particularly helpful in assessing the degree to which an instructor presents relevant and innovative content.

## **What Is Reviewed:**

Undergraduate and graduate course syllabuses, which include the course description, goals and objectives, readings list, textbook, course topics, and descriptions of assignments.

## **Reviewer's Comments to Unit Leader:**

Each reviewer provides the unit leader with written feedback as part of the tenure and promotion review letter that summarizes strengths, any areas of concern, and any recommendations for improving course content. The reviewer should base his/her report on the review criteria provided below, creating a summative review that addresses both the strengths and weaknesses of course content as a whole.

## **Review Criteria:**

Based on reading the course syllabuses, the reviewers should consider the following questions in developing a portion of the review letter that will be provided in the tenure and promotion document related to the instructor's course content:

- To what extent is the content comprehensive and appropriate for the course level? What suggestions, if any, do you have to improve this?
- To what extent does the instructor cover topics in a depth that is appropriate for students in the course? What suggestions, if any, do you have to improve this? (NOTE: It is recommended that a brief description of the student enrollment for the course be included in materials provided to external reviewers.)

- To what extent is the content accurate and reflects current thinking and contemporary research in the subject matter? If not, how could the instructor improve the accuracy or currency of the course content?
- To what extent is the course well organized? To what extent are the topics presented in a logical order where later knowledge builds on what is learned earlier? If not, what suggestions do you have for strengthening and improving the organization?
- To what extent do the descriptions of assignments and class activities, such as laboratories or field experiences, reflect the content of the course as described in the syllabus?
- To what extent do the activities and assessments meet the goals and objectives for the course?
- What are the strengths of the content of this course?
- What may be weaknesses of the content of this course? What suggestions do you have for addressing these weaknesses?
- How does the content of this course compare and contrast to similar courses taught by faculty members at your institution?