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## Benefits of Formative Teaching Observations

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# Benefits of Formative Teaching Observations

## UNLV Best Teaching Practices Expo 2019

Dan Gianoutsos, Ph.D., Academic Success Center

### The practice and the need it addresses

## Formative Teaching Observations

**The need:** For many faculty members, the practice of teaching serves as a critical component of their profession. Yet, faculty rarely receive formative feedback on their teaching from other faculty. Further, teaching evaluations, which are completed by students, are mostly conducted at the end of the term and thus provide a form of summative feedback.

**The practice: Formative Teaching Observations.** Formative teaching observations by peer teaching faculty can provide helpful advice about small changes to teaching that can improve teachers' and students' experiences during the term (see reference list). The researcher posits that the UNLV Teaching Observation project catalyzed real-time changes to the participating faculty's teaching and generated short-term solutions to some of their teaching challenges.

To assess the program, the researcher distributed and analyzed data from ten faculty who responded to a Qualtrics evaluation survey that focused on their participation in the project during the Fall 2018 semester. While more data is being collected, the preliminary results support the literature.

### Evidence this practice benefits UNLV Students

## Benefits to Observed Teachers

- Changes to teaching practice\*
- Short-term solutions to problems\*
- Teacher evaluation scores (before and after)

## Benefits to Students

- Students' participation improves
- Students' performance improves (e.g., test scores, project grades)
- Students' perception of the course quality improves
- Changes to students' learning practice

## \*Short-Term Adjustments by participating UNLV Faculty:

- "Simple and easy-to-implement advice were very useful. Getting a small tool helped me to move around the room and communicate more easily with students"
- "Simple things like typing out my lesson plan and sharing it with the students so that they see the course objectives in each lesson"
- Rethinking exam questions (Program Qualtrics Survey, 2019)

## References

Donnelly (2007), Fletcher, J.A. (2017), Gosling, D. (2002), Kohut, G.F., Burnap, C., & Yon, M.G. (2007), Lonoff, S. (1997), Lowder, L., Antiquilla, M., Colebeck, D., Das, S., Karim, M.A., Khalid, A., Singh, R. & Utschig, T. (2017), Siddiqui, Z.S., Jonas-Dwyer, D. & Carr, S.E. (2007), Sullivan, P. B., Buckle, A., Nicky, G., & Atkinson, S.H. (2012)

### Resources and where to find them

## Teaching Observation Project

The UNLV Teaching Observation project (<https://www.unlv.edu/provost/idr/consultation>) promotes thoughtful dialogue about classroom dynamics and teaching practices (onsite and online) with the goal of enhancing teaching and learning experiences. Participation is voluntary and for formative purposes, and is not connected to annual reviews or promotion/tenure reviews.

Members of UNLV's teaching community may request a peer teaching observation online (<https://bit.ly/2BTcxPV>) from any of our UNLV Faculty Development Fellows (or from our trained student observers). The following institutions have developed protocols for best practices in teaching observations:

- University of Minnesota Peer Review of Teaching Materials ([http://www.academic.umn.edu/provost/peer\\_review/](http://www.academic.umn.edu/provost/peer_review/))
- Carl Weiman Science Education Initiative, University of British Columbia, Classroom Observation Protocol (<http://www.cwsei.ubc.ca/resources/COPUS.htm>)
- Mary Deane Sorcinelli Guidelines for Classroom Observation (<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0Bx9gwh3MRThOX05fWmxhNnhXOWs>)
- University of Colorado Physics Classroom Observation Protocol ([www.colorado.edu/physics/phys4810/phys4810\\_fa04/protocols/abbreviated.pdf](http://www.colorado.edu/physics/phys4810/phys4810_fa04/protocols/abbreviated.pdf))
- Rossier School of Education, University of Southern California, Faculty Peer Teaching Observation Guide (<https://faculty.usc.edu/files/2014/.../RossierFacultyPeerTeaching-ObservationGuide.pdf>)

### How other UNLV teachers might adopt this practice

## How to Utilize this Opportunity

[Sign up](#) to request a peer teaching observation from any of our [Faculty Development Fellows](#).

[This document](#) describes the peer observation process.

Observations consist of 3 parts, totaling approximately 3-4 hours of the faculty member's time:

- 1) Pre-observation meeting with observer and completion of Teaching Observation Menu
- 2) Class observation and completion of Summary Reflection Form
- 3) Post-observation meeting

**Summary Reflection Form**

*Instructions: Both the observer and instructor complete this form and bring it to the post-observation meeting.*

**From the Pre-Observation Form:**

Instructor's Goals

Instructor's Requested Areas for Insight

Logistics

- date(s) time(s) location(s) of observation
- seating location for observer
- was observer identified or anonymous?
- did the observer participate in class activities?
- is this the first observation, or a follow-up observation?

**Recommended Focus Areas:**

Observers, from your perspective:

1. Describe the class context (e.g., setting, background characteristics, composition of the class, etc.)

Description:

2. Overall Student Engagement Rating (circle one and provide comments): (low) 1 2 3 4 5 (high)  
*Engagement is defined as students contributing to and participating in the class being observed.*

Comments in support of your rating:

3. Overall Student Preparedness Rating (circle one and provide comments): (low) 1 2 3 4 5 (high)  
*Student preparedness is defined as students coming to class ready to learn (i.e., homework and preparatory tasks are completed).*

Comments in support of your rating:

4. Describe the teacher's instructional practices and student's learning practices observed:  
*Note: The instructor may or may not provide specific guidance here. If not, refer to the optional questions below.*
  - Consider what appeared to work well. Note at least 2-3 strengths.
  - Consider what appeared not to work well. Note at least 1 opportunity for improvement.

Comments:

5. What suggestions do you have for the instructor to consider? Indicate 2-3 suggestions.

Suggestions:

**Optional Focus Areas:**

For each optional practice identified on the Observation Menu, please provide the following information for each:

- Indicate the specific teacher instructional practice, or student learning practice.
- Describe your observations about that practice to support the rating.
- Identify helpful aspects of the practice that can be continued.
- Note less helpful aspects of the practice and how they might be adjusted to achieve an improved outcome.
- Offer any additional suggestions.