



## Get Cracking (at brunch) on Being Observed in Peer Evaluations

November 18, 2022

### Overview:

The intent of this session was to provide a resource for faculty in terms of how to prepare for and make the most of peer and chair evaluations.

### Key Takeaways:

- **Who can serve as a Peer Evaluator?**
  - Faculty can select the peer to do an evaluation, in consultation with the Chair. If a member is struggling to find a peer, ADC can help make connections.
  - Faculty conducting peer evaluations need to have completed the training for peer evaluations. There is a list available on MyMRU.
- **Best Practices:**
  - Ensure you have a 30-60 minute **pre-observation meeting** to discuss the observation, ask questions, identify the areas you seek to have feedback on, and/or gather/supply any materials and information needed.
    - Know what you want out of the evaluation and try to make it happen.
    - Understand your role as an active participant in your evaluation and know that observations are a collaborative process.
    - If you are teaching with methods or pedagogy unfamiliar to your observer, you can discuss this, provide information and context, and provide your teaching philosophy.
  - **During the observation**, introduce the person observing and inform students that the observer is not evaluating the students. It is best practice for observers to set aside their own teaching lens and observe teaching from the criteria on the form as well as whether the teaching achieves the instructor's objectives. (There are also opportunities to address this in the pre-meeting or in post reflections).
  - Approach the **Post-Observation meeting** as a learning opportunity to review feedback, reflect on what went well/what could be improved, and if there were unexpected comments from the observer discuss those. Think on feedback and incorporate this into future teaching. *Tenure committees look for progress in teaching, the post-observation reflection is an important piece to show progress.* Take feedback and comment on what you might change or improve. Pick out key pieces to reflect on.
- Do not be disappointed when your peer evaluator provides 'negative' feedback. It is best practice to provide some form of constructive feedback as being uncritical is not helpful.

### Speakers:

- Archie McLean - perspectives on being observed in peer evaluations
- Jennifer Boman - overview of best practices for peer observation
- Stephen Price - overview of related policy matters

## **Detailed Notes from the session:**

### **General Requirements and Information:**

- Who needs to be evaluated:
  - o For tenure track or probationary faculty, peer and chair evaluations are required.
  - o For contract faculty, only chair evaluations are required.
- Who can do the evaluation:
  - o The Collective Agreement provides for the Chair to designate a tenured faculty member to do an evaluation.
  - o If a peer evaluation is required, it is on the member to determine who does the evaluation. Faculty can select the peer to do an evaluation, in consultation with the Chair. If a member is struggling to find a peer, the Academic Development Centre is a great resource and can help members make connections. New faculty who may not know many people or who might not know who to ask to do a peer evaluation can contact the ADC as well.
  - o Important to keep in mind that faculty conducting peer evaluations need to have completed the training for peer evaluations. There is a list available on MyMRU. The Dean can make an exception with consultation with the Department Chair for an evaluation done by a peer without training.
  - o Keep in mind Conflicts of Interest. Article 9.9.4 of the Collective Agreement provides a non-exhaustive list of the types of conflicts that may arise. For example, in instances where there is a mutual benefit, such as co-researchers, relatives or, business interests, etc.
- Where to find more information:
  - o Be mindful of the forms available on MyMRU. Review the forms to familiarise yourself with the format and the questions as well as policies. Page 46 of the Tenure and Promotion Handbook outlines the process.

*There are three steps to the peer evaluation:*

1. *the pre-observation meeting,*
2. *the observation,*
3. *and the post-observation reflection.*



**THERE ARE CONCRETE ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE  
THROUGHOUT THE PEER OBSERVATION PROCESS TO  
MAKE IT A POSITIVE AND FORMATIVE PROCESS.**

### **Pre-Observation Meetings**

- Best practice for observations; ***have a pre-observation meeting.*** Meetings are typically between 30 and 60 minutes and are an opportunity for the member being observed to discuss the observation and the observer to ask any questions or gather any materials needed. For example, a conversation in the pre-observation meeting can include a discussion on what to expect from the class, from the observation, from the students, etc. This meeting is also an opportunity to discuss the class being observed and to provide any materials such as the course syllabus.
- The pre-observation meeting is an opportunity to discuss any practical elements of the observation such as where to sit, how long to stay, etc. Though the observers are not interviewing students, they can observe how students interact or respond throughout the observation. Observers are also, generally, not to participate in the class. An exception may be a workshop where participation would

make sense (e.g. an ADC workshop) and this situation would need to be discussed prior to the observation.

- The pre-observation meeting is also a time to discuss anything specific that the member being observed would like feedback on. For example, are there any strengths in their teaching or any specific areas they are working on.

### **Observations**

- Best practice during the observation; introduce the person observing and inform students that the observer is not evaluating the students.

### **Post-Observations**

- Post-Observation reflection provides an opportunity to review feedback and reflect on the observation. Reflect on what you liked or did not like, what went well or what could be improved, from your own perspective. Were there comments from the observer that were unexpected or out of the ordinary that you think should be discussed.
- Approach the reflection from a learning lens, if the observer provides suggestions, evaluate that, perhaps that was suggested for a reason. Think on feedback and incorporate this into future teaching. Reflect on any issues or anything you learned.
- Tenure committees look for progress in teaching, the post-observation reflection is an important piece to show progress. Take feedback and comment on what you might change or improve. Pick out key pieces to reflect on.

### **General Comments**

- Peer evaluations are opportunities for learning on both sides. From an observers' perspective, can learn new ways of teaching from peers. For the member being observed, the feedback provided can be used to develop teaching further.
- Scheduling the observation can be tricky. May be better to set an observation for a 'regular class' versus trying to set one for the 'best class' as the regular class may be easier to schedule and may be more useful in terms of feedback.
- Overall, you get in what you put out. Spending time in the pre-observation meeting will result in more tangible feedback. Spend time discussing what feedback you would like to receive. Do you want feedback on your assignments, your pedagogical approach, etc. Be specific.
- Be proactive in your approach, follow up with your observer before and after the observation.

### **Discussion:**

Question/Comment: It was suggested after my midterm review that I have observations done but it was not specified whether they be peer or chair. I have a distinct pedagogical approach and some of the comments on the SPoTs are not helpful, how do I go about these other observations?

Answer: linda manyguns, VP Indigenization and Decolonization, is working on developing an understanding for Indigenous roles in teaching. Also, you can have more peer evaluations done than the ones required for tenure. Observations are a great opportunity to learn, both for the member being observed and for the member observing. You can also go in and observe others, with permission, and this provides an opportunity for you to learn as well.

Question: Is there a way to formalise feedback after the fact?

Answer: You can include any additional evaluations in your tenure dossier. These can be included under a heading such as "Peer Observations Received" as additional documents. These can also be included after the reflective teaching section in year 3 and 5 submissions.

Question: Is the reflection official or is it optional?

Answer: They are not actually optional, though they may say optional. In year 3 and 5 reflections are included as part of the evaluation. After you receive an evaluation, you have 10 days to write a reflection and this is signed off on. The purpose of this is to show reflection and is an opportunity to submit additional context for feedback in issue.

Question: How should faculty be evaluated when they are given credit toward their probationary period?

Answer: Chop off one year for one year of credit so, for example, if you have 2 years credited, you would start year 3 in the next semester.

Question: Can you ask an observer to look at something in particular, for example add retroactive assignments that are not linked to the class being observed?

Answer: You can ask an observer to look at something in particular related to your teaching (assignments, instruction, etc.). An observer may not be able to do a deep dive into course materials but may be able to look at specific course items.

Question: Are observers being told to always add something negative?

Answer: Observations are a learning opportunity. It is best practice to provide some form of constructive feedback as being uncritical is not helpful. It is helpful to provide developmental feedback if available. There is no requirement that an observer must provide corrective action. Evaluations that are least useful are the overly positive "Good Job" or completely negative. The best evaluations provide at least some area(s) for improvement or suggestions. For example, did the observer comment on student engagement in the class? Were there any behaviours present or not present that could be considered? Etc. The Faculty Evaluation Committee of the MRFA made recommendations last year regarding the form and so there may be changes coming to how feedback is provided. The current language used can elicit certain feelings. Peer evaluations can provide an opportunity for you to come to conclusions yourself, use the peer evaluations as a self-assessment guide.

Question: Are there any ideas for what to observe or tips for what should be there or what to ask?

Answer: There are many things that could be observed. For example, you can share your teaching philosophy and ask how well it is being incorporated or you can ask for feedback on themes identified in SPoTs. Inform the observer of a theme identified in your SPoTs and how you have addressed this or what you have done to address it, and ask for feedback on that. You can also ask about the use of fillers, are there a lot of 'um's' and 'ah's', or you can ask about movement and engagement; do I move around the room or stand in one spot, do I ask questions and allow students to respond, how much of the class is spent with me talking versus students speaking, am I giving instruction only or do I create an active learning environment, etc.

Question: What if my teaching philosophy or style clashes with the observer? How do I know what feedback to listen to?

Answer: Best practice for observers is to set aside their own teaching lens and observe teaching from instructor objectives; does the teaching achieve these objectives. Observers are meant to look at the criteria provided and not look at their own teaching style and judge. There are also opportunities to address this throughout the observation process such as the pre-meeting or in post reflections.

Question: What is the best way to approach to address the post-observation reflection? We want to show improvements but how far do we go with this.

Answer: Think of the three steps; pre, observation, and post and think if there is anything that resonates with you that you want to point out to the tenure committee. Reflections can look different. Some reflections are a paragraph or two, or an identified action item or a deep dive and longer written piece. The reflection can point out if something is puzzling or if there is something conflicting in the feedback.

Question: What if the observer is not familiar with non-western teaching? Is there any advice for peer evaluations to not get railroaded?

Answer: One angle is to discuss this at the pre-observation meeting. It may be useful to provide information or ask questions or provide an article or some context for the teaching method. Can you show where you got the teaching method from? In the pre-observation meeting you can provide your teaching philosophy even if the observer does not ask you about it.

Question: Do you have any advice to 'get the most' out of peer evaluations?

Answer: Know what you want out of the evaluation and try to make it happen. Explain to the observer what you are looking for and how they can get that from you. Understand your role as an active participant in your evaluation. Observations are a two-way street. You can also look at what your students are getting out of your teaching, are there any tweaks you can make or are there things you could be doing or not doing to engage students? Feedback can be useful for this. Observations are a collaborative process, not one of judgement.