

New Full-time and Adjunct Faculty Classroom Observation

Procedures

1. New full-time and adjunct faculty members must receive information explaining the classroom observation procedure, criteria upon which their observation will be based, and a copy of the appropriate observation checklist from their department chair as soon as they are hired. In addition to receiving a hard copy of the above, the faculty member should be informed of the material's location on the web at <http://www.austincc.edu/hr/eval/faculty.php>.
2. Classroom observers must be department chairs or faculty in the discipline who are designated by the department chairs and possess at least three years full-time and effective teaching experience at ACC.
3. Classroom observers should contact those being observed as early as possible in the semester to set up at least one observation time. Observation should occur no earlier than mid-semester.
4. Prior to the observation, the classroom observer should meet with the faculty member being observed. At this time, they should discuss observation criteria and should discuss the nature of the course being evaluated.
5. The classroom observer should observe the faculty's classroom for a minimum of 50 minutes.
6. Within 24 hours of the observation, the classroom observer must contact the faculty member to share preliminary observation results.
7. The completed classroom observation checklist should be sent to the faculty member being observed and to his or her department chair for use in evaluation. The faculty member being observed may submit to the department chair a written response to the content of the classroom observation checklist.
8. If the faculty member being observed has any questions or concerns about the observation comments, he or she should set up an appointment with the classroom observer and the department chair to discuss the results.

Criteria for Evaluating Classroom Observation

For use with Classroom Observation Checklist

Classroom Observation Preparation and Goals

The teaching concepts and values discussed below are an integral part of the classroom observation checklist. When a classroom observer visits a new faculty member's class, he or she will be evaluating and noting how that faculty member is incorporating these ideas. The classroom observer will need to be thoroughly versed (both from personal experience and other types of training) in the various ways a teacher can be effective in the areas of class structure, methods, teacher-student interaction, and course content. Every effort will be made by the observer to objectively comment upon the teacher's effectiveness. The goal is to reinforce successful teaching and to offer helpful commentary.

ACC Teaching Values

Austin Community College realizes that teaching is a highly individualized activity. Teaching techniques which work for one faculty member may not be effective for another faculty member in a different discipline or even in the same discipline. Indeed, there is no one way to be an effective teacher.

However, several broad concepts are especially important in bringing about effective classroom instruction. Whenever possible, ACC faculty should attempt to assure that these concepts are a part of most class periods. Each is addressed on the classroom observation checklist. A more thorough explanation of each part of the checklist is given below.

Elements in Effective Classroom Instruction From Classroom Observation Checklist

Class Structure

A well-structured class often begins with a brief review of concepts from the previous class period, if time allows. In addition, students benefit from a brief overview of the major concepts of each new class. Summarizing the main points covered allows students the opportunity to review their own notes for thoroughness before the class period ends. And, finally, it is important that students be told what is expected of them for the next class period.

Methods

Although various teachers use various teaching methods, clear communication is the basis of all of them. Providing handouts is an aid to this clear communication, as is something as simple as writing legibly on the board. Although well-planned and well-delivered lectures are tried and true tools of the teaching trade, non-lecture learning activities are becoming increasingly common in most college classrooms today because they offer a different way for nonverbal learners to learn. For example, whenever possible, classroom discussion is also a valuable tool as it allows students to actively participate in the topic and keeps them from becoming mere “sponges,” soaking up information.

Stimulating discussion can be difficult. Asking students questions can trigger much discussion; however, these questions need to be carefully phrased. For example, simple "yes or "no" questions are not going to stimulate discussion. Similarly, posing a rhetorical question is going to imply that discussion is not encouraged. A second part of the discussion approach has to do with handling student responses. A teacher needs to allow students sufficient time to answer and should offer sincere, not forced, verbal reinforcement. Students are much more likely to participate in group-discussion if they feel comfortable that their ideas have value.

Using technology and linking to web-based resources in the classroom is also valuable in certain classes when it actually provides for increased effectiveness. Certainly, the use of technology simply for technology's sake is not effective. However, technology can enliven the classroom and create visual interest in the content. Using electronic resources, videos, or other audio-visual materials can offer experiences and information to students in a way that simple lecture and handouts cannot.

Teacher-Student Interaction

Faculty members at ACC often teach well over 100 students per semester. Establishing a close relationship with each is not possible. However, creating a solid teacher-student interaction is an important way for faculty to assure effective learning takes place. Calling students by name as early as possible in the semester and making eye contact can pull hesitant students more quickly into the learning process. Seeking student ideas, suggestions, and discussion reminds students that they have a role in their own learning. In addition, it's also important, when possible, to involve all students in class

discussion and activities so that the primary beneficiaries are not just the vocal few. While not always possible, establishing a comfortable rapport with students is integral in effective teaching.

Content

The success of the classroom experience hinges on content. Being well-organized imparts a professionalism that students appreciate and respect. Appearing knowledgeable and explaining concepts clearly in several different ways is probably one of the most important teaching tools of all time. And, students absorb information and knowledge much more readily when it relates to experiences they understand and are able to relate to.

As has been noted, no one teaching technique is effective for all teachers. And, not all students respond as positively as we would like to our best teaching efforts. Anyone who has taught for any period of time knows that some students will never allow student-teacher interaction; some will never participate in discussion; some will never have homework ready no matter how you stress its importance. But, the majority of students appreciate learning from a faculty member whose preparation includes attention to class structure, effective methods, teacher-student interaction, and content.

Definitions of Classroom Observation Checklist Ratings

Could Improve

A rating of “Could Improve” signals that the faculty member has not demonstrated effectiveness in the area being observed. For example, a teacher may only quickly refer to the homework for the next class period, without fully explaining the requirements of the homework. Or, the faculty member may use inferior handouts that are hard to read and understand. Perhaps the faculty member has problems organizing his or her thoughts and lecture content or does not clearly explain the concepts being taught. This rating implies that with some effort, the faculty member could greatly improve his or her effectiveness in the area noted.

Acceptable

A rating of “Acceptable” indicates that the faculty member has adequately addressed the area being observed. For example, to a degree, he or she invited class discussion or employed non-lecture activities. Perhaps his or her lecture is thorough and sound, though it is not exceptionally good. Or, to an acceptable degree he or she relates concepts to student experience. An “Acceptable” rating indicates that the teacher has satisfied the important minimum expectations; however, he or she has not demonstrated exceptional facility in this area.

Excellent

A rating of “Excellent” reveals that the faculty member being observed has demonstrated exceptional facility in the area observed. He or she conducted an effective classroom discussion, involving all members of the class. He or she may have used effective and innovative technology that caught class attention and interest. Perhaps the faculty member is exceptionally organized or has a uniquely effective way of explaining complex topics. An “Excellent” rating indicates that the teacher is especially effective, engaging the students’ intellectual curiosity.

Not Observed

A rating of “Not Observed” indicates one of two things: first it may indicate that the observation area on the checklist does not apply to the course being taught. For example, the classroom environment may not allow for a board upon which to write legibly. Or, the hands-on approach of some courses may preclude any use of handouts.

Or, this rating may indicate that the area addressed on the checklist did not occur in the class being observed when it could have or should have been. For example, although the class environment and course topic might lend itself to the use of technology, a rating of “Not Observed” would indicate that although technology could have been used effectively, it was not.

Whether the former or the latter is the case, the classroom observer must explain in the comments portion of the checklist why the “Not Observed” rating was assigned.