

Guidelines for Conducting Classroom Observations
Pedagogy Project
University of Montana
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This year, due to the university's multiple classroom formats, many of which include some type of remote instruction, we are focusing classroom observations on a common thread that could be observed in any modality and is of particularly importance during the current pandemic, active teaching practices.

Active learning refers to teaching strategies that engage students as active participants in their learning. These teaching practices have been correlated with high levels of student achievement and personal development; in addition, they can shrink the psychological size of a campus, initiating student activity that creates a feeling of closer proximity (Kuh, O'Donnell, and Schneider, 2017).

Steps for Classroom Observation:

Provide access to course.

- Identify date, time, or timeframe for observation experience.
- Provide faculty observer "Guest" access to your Moodle shell if applicable for the modality of the course.
- Provide Zoom link for synchronous observations.
- Communicate safety protocol for face-to-face course observations.

Identify areas of focus. Be sure to email your partner course or class outcomes. In addition communicate with the instructor what pedagogical areas you would like them to focus on. For example, based on the modality of the course, an instructor might want feedback on the following engaging teaching practices:

Classes with asynchronous components:

- communication between student and faculty (e.g. welcome message, regular announcements, email messages).
- encouragement of cooperation between students (e.g. discussion prompts that stimulate student participation, an explanation criteria for quality discussions, group or collaborative projects).
- engaging course activities (e.g. opportunity for gathering information and analyzing solutions to problems; active use of speaking, writing, or other forms of self-expression).
- integration of visual and auditory material in the course of lecture,
- opportunities for students to "customize" their learning, integrating assignments into personal or professional interests.

Classes with synchronous components:

- Collection of student responses that are shared that with remote and in-person students (e.g. through polling, chats, or annotation features of Zoom).
- Effective use of breakout rooms (e.g. clear and engaging prompts, broadcasts messages, and integration of discussion into classroom objectives).
- Engaging large class instruction (e.g. uses chat, hand raising, or annotations to encourage discussion).

Classes Meeting Face-to-Face:

- Provides opportunities for meaningful class discussion (e.g. asks students to pose questions, solve problems).
- Opportunities for applying course concepts, raising questions during lecture.
- Integration of visual and auditory material during the course of lecture.
- Methods for checking understanding of course material during class period.
- Relating course instruction to course outcomes.

*Since some classrooms have blended modalities, please combine suggestions as appropriate for the class for which you are providing feedback. Also, know that observations do not have to be limited to these areas of suggested feedback. Please identify for your partner the areas of engaging teaching you would most benefit from them focusing on.

Feedback. In your feedback, be sure to:

- have a conversation about the ways in which the specific classroom material observed help students achieve the course *teaching outcomes*;
- be *specific*; avoid offering general affirmations or criticisms such as “that was a really interesting lecture” or “great job on the lecture”;
- focus on *behaviors* - what was the instructor doing/saying; what were students doing/saying;
- consider *documenting* what you saw: i.e. at 8:05 the lecturer started the class with a joke/anecdote; at 8:10 students responded to a query; at 8:30 students began to speak with each other in small groups - they did/did not talk about the content of the question.

Improvements. In addition to documentation, offer as a separate point of feedback potential modifications or means of improvement. The best feedback invites instructors to change or improve pedagogical behaviors on specific, concrete observations.

Resources:

Kuh, G., O'Donnell, K., & Schnedier, C. (2017). HIPs at ten. *Change*, 49(5), 8-16

Tobin Miller Shearer's Pedagogy Project Guidelines for Observations, Fall 2019

Taylor, A. H. (2017, June 23). A peer review guide for online courses at Penn State. John A. Dutton e-Education Institute. <https://facdev.e-education.psu.edu/evaluate-revise/peerreviewonline>