

Using and Writing a Teaching Narrative

A teaching narrative is a statement that addresses three key areas:

- 1) Philosophy of teaching and learning
- 2) Enactment of the philosophy through the use of specific examples of one's teaching practices
- 3) Self assessment and critical evaluation of teaching practices

A teaching narrative is unique to each individual and should be a reflection of how that person sees her or himself as a teacher.

Formative assessment and teaching narratives

Teaching narratives can be used for formative purposes, in helping one improve one's teaching. In reflecting on one's philosophy and spelling out evidence as to how this philosophy gets implemented, a teacher can identify places where he or she is succeeding as well as areas where continued work is under way or needed. Furthermore, the narrative can serve as a guidepost for where one wants to take teaching as well as a reminder of where one currently is or previously was.

Summative assessment and teaching narratives

Teaching narratives can also be used for summative purposes in making decisions on tenure, promotion, and merit. In this way, teaching narratives need to provide evidence of one's teaching and to place this evidence in a larger context. This might mean linking examples to components of one's philosophy, describing the context of a particular course (e.g., it was the first time it was taught), or reflecting on idiosyncrasies in a course and course evaluations.

Goodyear and Allchin (1998) suggest that the narrative can help teachers clarify their vision and serve as a reminder for why they teach. In line with this, Brookfield (1990) urges that the teaching narrative "is crucial to our personal sanity and professional morale" (p. 256).

What should a teaching narrative include, and how does one write one?

As mentioned above a teaching narrative should include three elements: a philosophy of teaching and learning, concrete evidence for how this vision is enacted, and an assessment of one's teaching.

Listed below are some key points to consider in addressing these three content areas:

1) Philosophy of Teaching and Learning

- What is the purpose of teaching and learning? Why do you teach?
- What are your overarching learning goals for students?
- What constitutes learning (e.g., based on Bloom's taxonomy in terms of remembering, describing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, creating new knowledge)?
- What is the role of the teacher and the student in your classes (e.g., is the teacher a "sage on the stage," are students expected to be self-directed learners)?
- What class organization and type of atmosphere do you think is most conducive to learning? Why? For what topic/class?

2) Enactment of Philosophy

- What are the specific learning objectives and/or goals that you have for each class you teach and how are those tied into your philosophy?
- What is your teaching style? How is this enacted in the various classes you teach (e.g., what are key pedagogies used in specific classes)?
- What is the rationale for the type, frequency, scaffolding, etc. of particular assignments and assessment tools (e.g., exams) and how does it link with your teaching philosophy and specific learning outcomes?
- In what ways are your methods linked to or informed by best practices either for teaching as a whole or for your specific discipline?
- What are some examples of changes you have made to your classes over time, innovations you have introduced, and/or unique practices you implement in your classes?
- How do your classes contribute to the larger goals of the department, the college, the university, and the discipline? Do they satisfy any special needs or requirements? For example, does the course you are discussing satisfy a core requirement, a requirement for the major, or a prerequisite for other courses? Is the course one of multiple sections taught by different individuals? Does the course have a common syllabus? Is the course connected to a lab or to other components such as service learning or field work?

3) Assessment and Critical Evaluation

- What evidence are you using to evaluate your teaching practices (e.g., student evaluations, peer observations) and to assess student learning (e.g., student performance on assignments/exams)?
- Based on this evidence, what is working in your courses and what is not? For sections where there are relevant differences in pedagogy, assignments, assessment etc., do address those differences. In what ways have you addressed concerns?
- How has your teaching, in general and for specific courses, changed over time? Are there changes or additions you have made to courses based on feedback or because you wanted to try something different or new?

A few specific reminders:

- 1) There is not a singular way of constructing a teaching narrative; instead it should be a unique reflection of the individual.
- 2) Teaching narratives should avoid generalizations and should instead provide specific, concrete examples.
- 3) The narrative should be targeted for the correct audience.
 - a. The narrative may vary depending on whether it is being used for summative or formative purposes.
 - b. When writing a teaching narrative for an audience at LMU, it is crucial to remember the values embedded in the University's Mission Statement and to also speak to them. Additionally, it is important to examine other statements on teaching that may guide the vision of one's College and/or Department.
 - c. Because teaching narratives are likely read by individuals from a range of disciplines, one should avoid the use of discipline specific jargon or explain it, if necessary.
- 4) Teaching narratives are not just a recitation of facts; they provide context and analysis of those facts as well.

Resources:

- Grundman, Helen G (2006), "Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement", *Notices of the AMS*, 53/11, 1329-1333.
- Vanderbilt University, Center for Teaching, "Exercises to Help You Get You Started", <http://cft.vanderbilt.edu/teaching-guides/reflecting/teaching-statements/#exercises>, accessed 04/19/13.
- Angelo, T., Cross, P. (1993), "Teaching Goals Inventory", *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers*, San Francisco (CA): Jossey-Bass.

Bibliography

Goodyear, G.E., & Allchin, D. (1998). Statements of teaching philosophy. In M. Kaplan (Ed.), *To Improve the Academy*, Vol. 17 (pp. 103-122). Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press and the Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education.

Brookfield, S. D (2006). *The Skillful Teacher: On Technique, Trust, and Responsiveness in the Classroom (2nd Ed)*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

This document was inspired by similar documents by the University Center for the Advancement of Teaching at Ohio State University and the Center for Teaching at Vanderbilt University

List of Courses Taught

Provide a complete and structured list of all courses taught at LMU. This list is supposed to give an overview – details should be reserved for the teaching narrative and the course material included (syllabi, assignments, etc.). List all courses in reverse chronological order with course/section numbers, course title, and enrollment. If in any semester the course load was less than standard explain why.

In addition to the basic elements in your teaching narrative, you should describe all relevant key aspects of your courses that allow someone not familiar with the classes to understand the typical expectations, challenges, opportunities, and pedagogies of your classes. Generally, points to include are:

- Characterize the typical student population in terms of year, majors/non-majors, etc.
- Describe the level of the class, such as introductory class, core major class, and/or upper-level elective; undergraduate/graduate level, etc.
- Identify special attributes this class fulfills such as Core Flags, Honors class, Study Abroad, etc.
- Identify whether it is an one-section class or one of several sections.
- Specify whether the class is team taught.

Depending on the discipline, there may be additional points to be included also in the list of courses in addition to the teaching narrative, such as:

- Learning outcomes within the curriculum map of the major/minor satisfied by the class.
- Prerequisites for the class.
- Other classes this class serves as prerequisite for and what the resulting requirements for this class are and how they were met.
- Lab or other class associated with course.
- Common syllabus or other special requirements that may apply to this class.
- Typical support through teaching assistant, grader, etc.
- Key pedagogies used in the class, such as lecture-based class, reading/writing-intensive class, service learning, etc.
- Special prerequisites, activities, schedule, etc.

All aspects included in the list of courses should be addressed also in the teaching narrative. The teaching narrative should provide additional context. The list of relevant points here is not exhaustive and may depend on the college/school, department, and subject matter taught.

Using Peer Review of Course Materials

Course materials play an important role in shaping in-class learning and out-of-class experiences. These materials provide insight into the instructor's course philosophy, expectations, and presentation of the subject matter. Peers are best able to judge accuracy and adequacy of course materials. Advantages of conducting peer review of course materials include the relative convenience and unobtrusiveness, paired with the relatively high level of information that can be gained from these reviews.

Formative assessment and peer review of course materials

Review of course materials can enable peers to see an instructor's course philosophy in practice. Regular review or exchange of materials can promote reflective discussion about the goals of a course, goals of the larger academic unit, teaching assumptions, ways of motivating students, etc. for the enrichment of both the instructor and peer(s).

Summative assessment and peer review of course materials

Often when course materials are used for summative assessment several years of work are under review, and a very large number of course materials could be included in the review effort. Deciding how to choose a representative sample of material can be done by asking the faculty member to select items, or by requesting a few specific items from the faculty member. Most often a combination of these two methods are used to ensure some uniformity in how different instructors are treated when being reviewed and to allow each instructor some say in choosing items considered best for summative reviews.

Course materials that can be used in peer reviews

- Materials that communicate course policy and practices (syllabi, ground rules for discussion, teaching evaluation instruments, etc.).
- Materials that communicate content (course packets, bibliographies, handouts, multimedia supplements, etc.).
- Materials that serve as assignments and assess student performance (tests, project assignment directions, directions for classroom exercises, etc.).
- Instructor feedback on student work (graded papers or tests, journals, etc.).
- Materials that show development over time in content or teaching strategies used in a course.

Overall guidelines for peer review of course materials

Understanding the course context and instructor's rationale is important to a fair and effective peer review of course materials. The reviewer must take care to filter out his/her own biases for or against a specific teaching method or course design when reviewing materials. The review may be provided orally when used for formative assessment, and is generally made available in writing as part of a larger dossier when used for summative assessment.

General guidelines for conducting formative peer review of course materials

1. Gather course materials and contextual information about the course, instructor, students, ways in which the materials are used, and the instructor's concerns. For example, the instructor may ask the reviewer to pay particular attention to the appropriateness of tone used when giving instructions.
2. Review the materials.
3. Conduct a feedback conversation with the instructor about the review.

4. The reviewer should be available for follow-up conversations as an improvement plan is implemented.

General guidelines for conducting summative peer review of course materials

1. Gather a representative sample of course materials and corresponding contextual information about the course(s), instructor, students, and ways in which the materials are used.
2. Review the materials.
3. Report on the results using narrative, checklists, or rating sheets.

Just one tool in the toolbox...

It is important to remember course materials alone cannot provide a complete picture of an instructor's teaching. Ultimately, the best summative evaluation of a person's teaching comes from an examination of multiple sources of information across time. Because teaching is a multi-dimensional job, assessing what we do as teachers requires a multi-faceted approach. No single instrument can capture all aspects of any individual style or method of teaching. Peer review of materials is just one part of a comprehensive evaluation program and should be used alongside and in conjunction with other methods of assessment from the toolkit.

Resources:

- Chism, N. (2007), "Peer Review of Course Material," in: *Peer Review of Teaching: A Sourcebook*, San Francisco (CA): Jossey-Bass, pp 81-97.

Please use this checklist to review your syllabus. Items marked with * should be essential for all courses. Some disciplines or program areas have additional items that are considered essential. For selected items (marked +), suggested wording is offered on the back of this sheet. The latest version of this document and a template syllabus are available on the CTE website at <http://www.lmu.edu/cte> under Resources/Pedagogical Resources.

GENERAL INFORMATION: UNIVERSITY & COURSE

- *University name, semester and year
- *Course number, title, section number, days, time, classroom location

INSTRUCTOR CONTACT INFORMATION

- *Instructor name(s), title, office location, phone, email, fax, office hours

COURSE SPECIFIC INFORMATION

- Prerequisites (if any)**
- Course Description:** Provide description from the most recent LMU Bulletin.
- Required Text(s) (if any)**
- ***Learning Outcomes:** Describe what the student will know, be able to do, and value upon successful completion of the course.
- ***Grading Scheme:** Be very specific regarding the components of the grade, how each is weighted and include “floors” for each of the letter grades A (or A range) through D (or D range). One possible way to state a “floor” is as follows: an overall average of xx% will receive at least a grade of A-.
- Instructional Methods:** If applicable, describe instructional methods such as lecture-discussion, problem-based learning, group work, projects, presentations, critiques, community-based learning, portfolios, etc.
- Assignments, including Readings, Projects (with grading rubrics, if available), etc.:** In addition to the assignments, give policies including, if/how they will be graded and factored into the grade, and how late assignments will be handled.
- Exams/Quizzes (if applicable):** Give policy on missed exams or quizzes, and include the Final Exam date/time – available from the Registrar’s calendar.
- Use of Technology:** Explain what will be used/required/optional/allowed and how to access it.
- Attendance/Participation:** Policies at the professor’s option; check departmental norms.
- Extra Credit:** If offered, it must be fairly and universally offered, not just to selected students. Be specific how it is factored into the grading.

UNIVERSITY POLICY STATEMENTS (REQUIRED)

- *+**Americans with Disabilities Act**
- *+**Academic Honesty**
- *+**Tentative Nature of the Syllabus**

OTHER POLICY STATEMENTS (RECOMMENDED)

- +**Expectations for Classroom Behavior:** May refer to LMU’s *Community Standards*, the *Lion’s Code*, or LMU Student Affairs brochure *Disruptive and Threatening Student Behavior*, Fall 2010.
- +**Electronic devices in the classroom**
- +**Student responsibility for being available for e-mail communication via lion.lmu.edu address**
- +**Emergency Preparedness Information**

NOTE: This checklist derives from Grunert O’Brien, J., Millis, B. & Cohen, M. *The course syllabus: A learning centered approach*, Anker Press (2008) and Nilson, L. *Teaching at its best*, Jossey Bass, (2010).

Suggested Wording for Required and Selected Highly Recommended Items (marked +)

Americans with Disabilities Act: Students with special needs as addressed by the Americans with Disabilities Act who need reasonable modifications, special assistance, or accommodations in this course should promptly direct their request to the Disability Support Services Office. Any student who currently has a documented disability (physical, learning, or psychological) needing academic accommodations should contact the Disability Services Office (Daum Hall Room 224, 310-338-4535) as early in the semester as possible. All discussions will remain confidential. Please visit <http://www.lmu.edu/dss> for additional information.

Academic Honesty: Academic dishonesty will be treated as an extremely serious matter, with serious consequences that can range from receiving no credit for assignments/tests to expulsion. It is never permissible to turn in any work that has been copied from another student or copied from a source (including Internet) without properly acknowledging the source. It is your responsibility to make sure that your work meets the standard of academic honesty set forth in the "LMU Honor Code and Process" which appears in the *LMU Bulletin 2010-2011* (see http://www.lmu.edu/about/services/registrar/Bulletin/Bulletins_in_PDF_Format.htm.) Also, you might include a more specific statement about plagiarism if students will write papers in your class. Suggestions for preventing plagiarism are found at http://library.lmu.edu/Services_for_Faculty/Preventing_Plagiarism_links_for_faculty.htm

Tentative Nature of the Syllabus: If necessary, this syllabus and its contents are subject to revision; students are responsible for any changes or modifications distributed in class or posted on LMU's course management system MYLMU Connect (if you are using that technology). Important note to faculty Students should be notified of any syllabus revisions in the same manner(s) that the original syllabus was distributed (for example, distributed in writing in class and/or posting on MYLMU Connect).

Expectations for Classroom Behavior: It is important to be clear regarding expectations for classroom behavior, both in what is prohibited and how the instructor will manage behavioral issues including possible consequences. Three LMU documents are available to reference:

1. The LMU Student Affairs brochure *Disruptive and Threatening Student Behavior* (Fall 2010), which states "Disruptive behavior which is persistent or significantly interferes with classroom activities may be subject to disciplinary action. A student may be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs if their behavior constitutes a violation of the conduct code."
2. The *Lion's Code* (<http://www.lmu.edu/AssetFactory.aspx?vid=30313>)
3. LMU's *Community Standards* (see http://www.lmu.edu/studentlife/Judicial_Affairs/Standards_Publication.htm for the Student Conduct Code, Section IV. D).

Here is one possible wording based on the *Lion's Code*:

RESPECT FOR SELF AND OTHERS: As an LMU Lion, by the *Lion's Code*, you are pledged to join the discourse of the academy with honesty of voice and integrity of scholarship and to show respect for staff, professors, and other students.

Regarding cell phones, here is one possible wording:

ELECTRONIC DEVICES: Please turn off and put out of sight all electronic devices (other than a calculator or computer, if/when allowed) during class-time. The interruptions and/or distractions they cause disrupt class and interfere with the learning process.

Email Communication: If you plan to communicate with your students by email using the email addresses on PROWL (the registrar's database) or on LMU's course management system (MYLMU Connect), it will be important to tell them they must either check their student email account periodically or forward email from it to their personal account.

Here is one possible wording:

EMAIL COMMUNICATION: At times I will communicate with the entire class using campus email systems, so it is essential that you regularly check your lion.lmu.edu email address or forward your lion account email to your preferred email address.

Emergency Preparedness: To report an emergency or suspicious activity, contact the LMU Department of Public Safety by phone (x222 or 310-338-2893) or at the nearest emergency call box. In the event of an evacuation, follow the evacuation signage throughout the building to the designated safe refuge area where you will receive further instruction from Public Safety or a Building Captain. For more safety information and preparedness tips, visit <http://www.lmu.edu/emergency>. A longer syllabus insert is also available at <http://www.lmu.edu/cte>.

Loyola Marymount University - Course Evaluation Form



Course Title _____ Term _____

Instructor _____ Course/Section _____

MARKING INSTRUCTIONS

Please use a No. 2 pencil or black or blue ball point pen.

Correct Mark



Incorrect Marks



Please make no marks in this Area

Major(s): _____

Class Year: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Graduate Other

LMU Cumulative GPA: Under 2.0 2.0 - 2.49 2.5 - 2.99 3.0 - 3.49 3.5 - 4.0 Not Applicable

Your Class Attendance: Always Almost Always Usually Occasionally Rarely

Was this course in your major department? Yes No

Was this course required by your major? Yes No

Are you taking this course to fulfill Core requirements? Yes No

I had a strong interest in taking this course: Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

Instructions: Please **MARK** the response which **MOST ACCURATELY** reflects your opinion and include any comments or explanations to the following questions.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

1. Learning outcomes for the course were clearly stated. SA A U D SD

Comments:

2. The learning outcomes were effectively addressed in this course. SA A U D SD

Comments:

3. There were constructive interactions between the instructor and the students. SA A U D SD

Comments:

4. The instructor was accessible for discussions about the course. SA A U D SD

Comments:

5. I received feedback that improved my learning in this course. SA A U D SD

Comments:

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. The course challenged me to do my best work.

SA A U D SD

Comments:

7. My experience in the course increased my interest in the subject matter.

SA A U D SD

Comments:

8. How would you rate the overall effectiveness of the instruction in this course.

Very Good Good Fair Poor Very Poor

Comments:

9. OPTIONAL question for faculty or departmental use.

SA A U D SD

Comments:

10. OPTIONAL question for faculty or departmental use.

SA A U D SD

Comments:

11. What did you find to be most beneficial about the course?

12. What would have made this course more effective for you?

Guidelines for Interpreting Student Teaching Evaluations

Student teaching evaluations are the most commonly used measure for evaluating teaching in higher education. There are at least two purposes for evaluating teaching: to improve the teaching and to make personnel decisions (merit, retention, promotion). When using student teaching evaluations for either of these purposes, it is essential to follow certain guidelines to ensure valid interpretation of the data. The following guidelines are adapted from Theall and Franklin (1991) and Pallett (2006).¹

#1. Sufficient Response Ratio

There must be an appropriately high response ratio.² For classes with 5 to 20 students enrolled, 80% is recommended for validity; for classes with between 21 and 50 students, 75% is recommended. For still larger classes, 50% is acceptable. Data should not be considered in personnel decisions if the response rate falls below these levels.

#2. Appropriate Comparisons

Because students tend to give higher ratings to courses in their majors or electives than they do to courses required for graduation, the most appropriate comparisons are made between courses of a similar nature. For example, the Bellarmine College of Liberal Arts average would *not* be a valid comparison for a lower division American Cultures course.

#3. When Good Teaching is the Average

When interpreting an instructor's rating, it is more appropriate to look at the actual value of the rating instead of comparing it to the average rating. In other words, a good rating is still good, even when it falls below the average.

#4. Written Comments

Narrative comments are often given great consideration by administrators, but this practice is problematic. Only about 10% of students write comments (unless there is an extreme situation), and the first guideline recommends a minimum 50% response threshold. Thus decisions should not rest on a 10% sample just because the comments were written rather than given in numerical form! Student comments can be valuable for the insights they provide into classroom practice and they can guide further investigation or be used along with other data, but they should not be used by themselves to make decisions.

#5. Other Considerations

- Class size can affect ratings. Students tend to rank instructors teaching small classes (fewer than 10 or 15 students) most highly, followed by those with 16 to 35 and then those with over 100 students. Thus the least favorably rated are classes with 35 to 100 students.
- There are disciplinary differences in ratings. Humanities courses tend to be rated more highly than those in the physical sciences.

#6. One Final Point

Teaching is a complex and multi-faceted task. Therefore the evaluation of teaching requires the use of multiple measures. In addition to teaching evaluations, the use of at least one other measure, such as peer observation, peer review of teaching materials (syllabus, exams, assignments, etc.), course portfolios, student interviews (group or individual), and alumni surveys is recommended.

Contact the Center for Teaching Excellence (310-338-5866) if you need assistance in adopting one of these alternate measures or have any questions about these guidelines.

¹ Pallett, W. "Uses and abuses of student ratings." In *Evaluating faculty performance: A practical guide to assessing teaching, research, and service*. Peter Seldin (ed.). Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing, 2006.

Theall, M. and Franklin, J. (eds.) *Effective practices for improving teaching*. New Directions in Teaching and Learning, no. 48, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991.

² The following describes how to compute the response ratio for a given set of forms from one section of one course. First, note the number (n) of forms returned and the number (N) of students in the class, compute the ratio n/N , and then multiply by 100% to convert the ratio to a percent. Then, for each question under consideration, from this percent subtract the percent of blank and "Not Applicable" responses. The result is the response ratio for that particular question. If the result does not meet the threshold recommended in Guideline #1 above, the data from that question should not be considered.

Evaluation of Teaching and the Role of Peer Observation

Because teaching is a multi-dimensional activity, assessing what we do as teachers requires a multi-faceted approach. No single instrument can capture all aspects of any individual style or method of teaching. Student surveys, for example, can measure whether student perceptions of what we are doing are aligned with what we ourselves think we are doing, but assessing our teaching requires more than “consumer impressions.” *Peer observation is just one part of a comprehensive evaluation program and should be used alongside and in conjunction with other methods of evaluation.*

What is peer observation?

As a basic definition, peer observation is the process by which university instructors provide feedback to colleagues on their teaching efforts and practices.

More nuanced definitions of peer observation distinguish observations for *formative* purposes from those for *summative* purposes. When peer observations are made for *formative* purposes, feedback is given with the goal of helping an instructor improve or alter his/her teaching. When peer observations are made for *summative* purposes, a judgment about a person's teaching is made for purposes of evaluation (see handout on Formative and Summative Evaluation for further analysis of the distinction).

Definitions of peer observation also distinguish *holistic observations* of teaching from *observations of in-class instruction*. *Peer observation that is holistic* might include review of in-class interactions with students and instructor presentations as well as review of course design (e.g., the syllabus), instructional handouts, assignments, exams, and course content (e.g., rigor and appropriateness of material covered). *Observations of in-class instruction*, in contrast, are focused solely on the class-session and the tools the instructor uses during that session to teach the students.

Why peer observation?

There are several benefits that accompany peer observation. First, reviews from peers provide a source of evidence regarding teaching effectiveness for committees such as Rank and Tenure to use so that student ratings are not the only or primary source of information.

Furthermore, though students are well-equipped to assess their own experience in a course, colleagues are better suited for evaluating each other on matters of content and professionalism. Some key areas in which faculty are considered to be expert reviewers include:

- Course organization
- Clarity and appropriateness of course objectives
- Classroom management and engagement of students
- Selection of course content
- Effectiveness of instructional materials (e.g., readings, media)
- Appropriateness of methods used to teach specific types of content
- Commitment to teaching and concern for student learning
- Support of departmental instructional culture

Additionally, peer observation opens up dialogue about teaching. Too often, teaching is viewed as a private act and, as such, discussions about teaching and the transition of expertise from one to another do not occur. Through peer observation, the classroom becomes more of a public space, and as a consequence, all involved (i.e., both the observer and the person being observed) learn something about their teaching.

What are the risks in using peer observation?

One downside of peer observation is that it may be difficult for even a well-intentioned observer to filter out his/her own bias against a given teaching method or personality while conducting an observation. For example, someone who values strict classroom control and considers the instructor's presentation to be the key learning object of the classroom may not keep an open mind when observing moments of seeming chaos in a collaborative learning classroom, and vice versa. *For this reason, instructors who use peer observations for feedback will need to consider the observer's assumptions about teaching and plan for multiple visits by multiple peers.*

Another risk is that if colleagues within the same department observe one another and the process is not well-managed, relationships may suffer. For many faculty members, their teaching is a sensitive, almost private topic. And because it is performed by colleagues, peer observation requires a particularly delicate touch. Being informed about best practices for peer observation is one way to reduce the risk of potential damage.

Finally, with regard to peer observation for summative purposes, one observation of a classroom session can never capture the entirety of a person's teaching effectiveness. Just as peer observation needs to be utilized in combination with other tools, individual peer observations should be combined with one another as a way to get a richer sense of a faculty member's teaching across time, across classes etc.

Using Peer Observation

Peer observation of teaching, in which one faculty colleague observes and comments on a classroom session of another faculty colleague, often serves two purposes. First, peer observation can be used in a *formative* manner, where the information gathered from such a review is meant to help a teacher improve his or her teaching skills. Second, peer observation can be used in a *summative* manner, where the information gathered is applied to personnel decisions (e.g., promotion, tenure, merit).

Formative assessment and peer observation

Peer observation can be used effectively for the purpose of formative assessment. In some cases, an instructor wants to receive personalized feedback on how a course is going, how students are responding to an activity, or simply whether or not students appear to be learning, and peer observation can provide this feedback. *In order for peer observation for formative purposes to be effective, it must respond to the concerns and self-perceived needs of the instructor who requests it. It must also be carried out by someone who is trusted and holds the respect of the person whose teaching is being assessed.*

Summative assessment and peer observation

Peer observation can provide valuable information regarding teaching delivery in one class session despite the fact that a single classroom observation can never provide a comprehensive picture of teaching. For several reasons, best practices suggest that it is hard (if not impossible) to utilize peer observation in a summative way (Arreola, 2007). A single peer observation, by definition, lacks reliability, and observations across a variety of reviewers and courses suffer a similar lack of reliability. Additionally, one classroom session can never capture the entirety of a person's teaching. Furthermore, the presence of an observer in the classroom changes the dynamic of a classroom and therefore may not be a true reflection of a person's teaching. Finally, peer observers may be biased based on what they do in their own classrooms.

In order to strengthen the validity of peer observation as a summative tool, a couple general points must be heeded. First, in order to reduce bias, both participants in the review process (the one doing the review and the one being reviewed) must agree ahead of time on the tool that will be used to make the evaluation. Second, all parties using the review (including the evaluator him or herself, Chairs, Rank and Tenure committees) must see it as an observation of a single class session and must limit generalizations to an instructor's "teaching" more broadly.

What factors are necessary for a fair and effective peer observation process?

The single most important factor in successful peer observation of teaching is the careful preparation (via orientation and training) of the faculty evaluators. This may seem counter-intuitive, since the faculty can cite their great amounts of teaching experience as sufficient training, but it is difficult to over-estimate the risk of launching a program without making sure everyone practices certain procedures and techniques and understands why they are essential. Included next in the toolkit is a suggested process to be followed in conducting peer observations.

Just one tool in the toolbox...

Ultimately, the best summative evaluation of a person's teaching comes from an examination of multiple sources of information across time. Because teaching is a multi-dimensional job, assessing what we do as teachers requires a multi-faceted approach. No single instrument can capture all aspects of any individual style or method of teaching. Peer observation is just one part of a comprehensive evaluation program and should be used alongside and in conjunction with other methods of assessment from the toolkit.

Key Steps in the Process for Peer Observation

1. Plan the Peer Observation

- Select who will be doing the peer observation. This may vary by departments. Examples include:
 - a. Peer observer chosen by the Chair,
 - b. By the faculty member being reviewed, or,
 - c. A combination of the two.
- Coordinate to determine the date of the classroom visit and arrange a pre-observation meeting between the instructor and observer.
- Determine which instrument is most appropriate for assessing the classroom session.
 - a. What type of course is this?
 - b. Does the department have a specific peer observation form?

2. The Pre-Observation Meeting

- Must take place prior to the classroom visit and preferably within 48 hours of the visit (if possible).
- At this meeting, the *instructor* should:
 - a. Confirm when and where the class meets.
 - b. Mention any preference regarding where the observer should be seated.
 - c. Provide the observer with a copy of the syllabus and/or other pertinent materials relevant for this particular class.
 - d. Indicate the instructional goals (learning outcomes) for the class to be observed.
 - e. Describe what is planned for the class, including teaching strategies or issues.
 - f. Explain what students have been asked to do in preparation for the class.
 - g. Indicate anything to which the observer may want to pay special attention.
 - h. Discuss expectations regarding student interaction during the observed class.
 - i. Recommend the time needed for a meaningful observation (i.e., how long does the observer need to remain in the classroom).
- At this meeting, the *observer* should:
 - a. Review the observational instrument with the instructor.
 - b. Review the department's teaching standards.
 - c. Ask the instructor if there is anything to which he/she should pay special attention, if not previously identified by the instructor.
 - d. Ask the instructor about prior observations and feedback from those sessions as a way to connect the current observation with previous ones (if any).
 - e. Schedule a post-observation meeting.

3. The Classroom Observation

- During the classroom observation, the *instructor* should:
 - a. Introduce the reviewer to the students and briefly explain the purpose of the visit.
 - b. Answer any questions the students may have regarding the visit.
- During the classroom observation, the *observer* should:
 - a. Observe the class using the instrument chosen in (1).

- b. Record any impressions, thoughts, or questions to be discussed with the instructor at the post-observation meeting.
- c. Refrain from participating directly in the course unless asked to do so.

4. The Post-Observation Meeting

- This meeting should take place within one week following the classroom observation.
- At this meeting, the *instructor* should:
 - a. Describe what went well with the class and what may need to be changed in order to improve.
 - b. Indicate anything that was unusual about the class.
- At this meeting, the *observer* should:
 - a. Discuss with the instructor what she or he thought went well and what, if anything, could have been improved.
 - b. Describe (not evaluate) what was observed during class.
 - c. Provide any other useful feedback to the instructor.

5. Writing the Letter

- Following the post-observation meeting, the observer writes the letter.
- The observer provides a copy of the letter to the instructor.
- The observer submits a copy of the letter to the department Chair.

The process laid out in this document is largely meant for summative evaluation purposes, though there are elements that can also be used in a formative evaluation process as well. Please be clear that formative and summative evaluation have different aims and should be conducted separately. More information on a process which is more directly related to formative evaluation of teaching is forthcoming from LMU's Committee on the Comprehensive Evaluation of Teaching.

PEER OBSERVATION FORM

Instructor:

Number of Students

Course:

Present:

Peer Observer:

Date:

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Unable to judge or N/A
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Instructor Organization	5	4	3	2	1	-
The goals of the class session are clearly stated.						
The class is focused on its stated goals.						
The class reflects thoughtful presentation.						

Comments:

Presentation skills	5	4	3	2	1	-
The instructor shows enthusiasm for the subject matter.						
The instructor is an effective presenter; the delivery of material is clear and easy to follow.						
The instructor uses presentation tools appropriately and effectively (e.g., whiteboard, PowerPoint, handouts, technology, hands-on materials, etc.).						

Comments:

Clarity	5	4	3	2	1	-
Instructor defines new terms or concepts.						
Instructor uses examples and/or applications to explain content.						
Instructor elaborates or repeats complex information.						
The instructor responds to questions clearly.						

Comments:

Content knowledge	5	4	3	2	1	-
The content is relevant to the topic of the course.						
The content supports the goals for the class session.						
The instructor contextualizes class content.						

Comments:

 Rapport with students	5	4	3	2	1	-
There are positive interactions between the instructor and the students.						
Instructor integrates student contributions into the class.						
Instructor responds appropriately to student comprehension and needs.						

Comments:

In addition, please comment on the following (add separate sheet if appropriate).

What worked well in the class? Explain.

**What could have been improved, if applicable? Explain.
Do you have any specific suggestions?**

PEER OBSERVATION FORM Additional Criteria

Instructor:

Number of Students

Course:

Present:

Peer Observer:

Date:

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Unable to judge or N/A
----------------	-------	----------------------------	----------	-------------------	------------------------

	5	4	3	2	1	-

Comments:

	5	4	3	2	1	-

Comments:

	5	4	3	2	1	-

Comments:

	5	4	3	2	1	-

Comments: