

Peer Observation of Teaching in 2nd-Year Reviews

A. Overview

Starting in AY 2023-2024, as approved by Edgerley Family Dean of the FAS Claudine Gay, second-year reviews of assistant professors and externally appointed associate professors include peer observation of teaching. This is the initial implementation of a recommendation that came out of the FAS's AY 2020-2021 review of the tenure-track system.

The Tenure-Track Review Committee (TTRC) recommended peer observation as a form of mentoring and professional development, in line with the FAS's developmental approach to teaching, advising, and mentoring. "The FAS endorses a *developmental* view...that these activities are learned over time, and as important as 'achievements' in these areas are the effort, thoughtfulness, and willingness to improve that a faculty member demonstrates."¹

Below, we describe the process for conducting peer observation of teaching in 2nd-year reviews. This process was developed in close collaboration with the Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning. In coming years, we expect to integrate peer observation of teaching into other stages of the tenure track.

Mindful of faculty workload, the process below utilizes to a limited extent the membership of an already-existing committee (the 2nd-year review committee) and locates training and some administrative record-keeping in the Bok Center.

B. Peer Observation Process

Overall Timing: Peer observation of teaching should take place during the second year of teaching and conclude far enough in advance that information from the peer observation can be reviewed by the 2nd-year review committee and included in its overall assessment of the faculty member.

Selection of Peer Observers: The chair of the second-year review committee identifies member(s) of the committee who will observe the faculty member's teaching and asks them to sign up at the Bok Center website (<https://bokcenter.harvard.edu/peer-observation>) for training in peer observation. The peer observer(s) should be senior faculty.

Bok Center Training:

¹ Peer observation of teaching in 2nd-year reviews does not encompass advising and mentoring. As the *FAS Appointment and Promotion Handbook* notes, "Teaching, advising, and mentoring are distinct categories of activity and assessment. **Teaching:** refers to classroom teaching of undergraduates and graduate students. **Advising:** refers to the many ways that faculty provide intellectual guidance to undergraduates and graduate students outside of the classroom, and to postdocs. This includes, and is not limited to, such things as (for undergraduates) senior thesis advising or concentration advising and (for graduate students) dissertation advising, advising on Ph.D. oral exams, etc. **Mentoring:** in contrast to the intellectual advising described above, refers to faculty efforts to support the professional development and career development of undergraduate students, graduate students, TFs, and postdoctoral fellows."

- Training may include some “pre-work” (e.g., watching a few brief video clips of classroom situations and reflecting on the dynamics observed therein) plus a 90-minute, in-person training at the Bok Center.
- Training is required of all peer observers of teaching in 2nd-year reviews. However, faculty only need to complete this training once every three years (and only if they are asked to peer-observe teaching for a 2nd-year review). The Bok Center will keep track of faculty members’ training dates, so that they can let faculty know if they are due for a “refresher” training.
- Upon completion of the training, faculty observers will have the opportunity to request a Bok Center facilitator to join the class observation and meetings described in the “Peer Observation” section below. Faculty are encouraged to include a Bok Center facilitator, who can share pedagogical best practices and resources.

Peer Observation:

The tenure-track faculty member and the observer(s) decide together which course and class meeting will be observed. The peer observation typically consists of 3 parts:

- **“Pre-observation” conversation.** The observer(s) and the tenure-track faculty member meet prior to the observation to discuss the tenure-track faculty member’s teaching approach and goals and come to a shared understanding of what to expect during the class session to be observed.
- **Observation.** NB: Peer observation should take place in person; observers should not observe a taped version of the class.
- **“Post-observation” meeting.** The observer(s) and the faculty member, usually accompanied by a Bok Center facilitator, debrief on the class and discuss feedback.

Feedback Letter:

- After the “post-observation” meeting, the observer(s) prepares a feedback letter for the candidate and sends it to the candidate and the 2nd-year review committee, so that the review committee can review it and incorporate it into the overall 2nd-year assessment of the faculty member.
- The feedback letter on teaching summarizes the tenure-track faculty member’s strengths and areas for improvement in teaching and offers concrete suggestions for how the faculty member can continue to develop as a teacher.