FACULTY PEER ONLINE CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

Philosophy

Online class observations are meant to facilitate an instructor's professional growth. They will be used to create an opportunity for reflection and stimulate ideas for improvement in the online environment. Discussions, before and after the observation, should be positive experiences that emphasize sharing information and allow the instructor to contribute to his or her own development.

Procedure

- Online peer classroom observation involves observing faculty teaching in the online environment, analyzing related activities, and providing feedback.
- Observers will complete classroom observation form and schedule a follow-up visit with faculty member. Associate Dean or Dean will review comments and initial form before follow-up meeting. Constructive feedback including instructional enhancement suggestions and/or recommendations will be communicated to the instructor during the follow-up visit. Observer will review the documentation with the faculty, invite faculty's comments, and request faculty's signature and date. Faculty will receive a copy of the Classroom Observation Form. The original will be filed in the department.
- Each school will determine their process for tracking face to face and online classroom observations. This information will be stored electronically on the K: drive.

Process

1. Plan for observation
2. Conduct observation
3. Summarize observation notes on the classroom observation form
4. Provide feedback in a debrief meeting with the faculty member

Guidelines

- Information about observations/evaluations and classroom teaching expectations will be provided to new hires in their hire packet.
- Full-time faculty will be observed as needed.
- Identification of faculty to be observed:
  - All new faculty during their first term
  - Systematically chosen faculty (e.g. develop an observation cycle)
  - Faculty identified by dean and associate deans
- Part-time faculty will be observed at least once a year. Each term the list of part-time faculty will be obtained from the Administrative Support Specialist and added to the observation spreadsheet that is maintained for respective programs/disciplines.
- Any instructor requiring more than two visits or for whom a serious concern has been raised will be referred to the respective associate dean or dean for observation/intervention recommendations.

- The observer should not overwhelm instructors with excessive information, but instead distill the many potential pieces of feedback into a core set of strengths and opportunities - we recommend no more than three of each.
- The observers should provide objective feedback on classroom/learning strategies, which focuses on development.

Deadlines

✦ Debrief meeting should be scheduled no later than two weeks after observation.

Strategies for Effective Online Class Observation

General Comments
The observation is a collegial conversation that emphasizes sharing information. The observation and resulting discussions should strengthen your relationship with the observed instructor. It's recommended that you meet with the instructor before and after the observation. Remember to keep observations confidential.

Before Observation
- Plan the observation. Arrange times for a pre-observation meeting, the class observation, and a debrief.

- Review instructor background.

- Review observation form and supplemental materials. (e.g. syllabus, course schedule, course outline, handouts, etc.)

- Meet with the instructor. Discuss the online class to be observed as well as any other issues relevant to the course or section. Ask the instructor if there are particular teaching concerns he or she wishes to address and incorporate these into the observation and debrief.

During Observation
- Observe both small details and the "big picture."

- Take notes. Effective notes should aid recall of specific examples as well as broader impressions.

- Be aware that you may have a bias for styles similar to your own and keep an open mind.
- Do not be distracting in any way. Do not ask or answer questions. Do not interrupt or interfere with the class.

After Observation
- Prepare for your debrief meeting by reviewing all of your notes. Develop an account of the following: a) an overall assessment of the class, b) up to three core strengths and three opportunities for growth, and c) specific examples that support your observations. Remember that one class may not be representative

- The debrief is an opportunity for colleagues to participate in productive exchanges about online teaching and course content. Debriefs need not be overly directive—ideally they should unfold as conversations. Regardless of format, it is important for the observer to remain constructive and forthcoming throughout the debrief. A debrief might follow this basic framework:
  o Ask an open-ended question about the instructor's assessment of the class. Use what you learn from their answer to create congruence between your feedback and the instructor's sense of the class.
  o Address the two questions: What are the instructor's principal strengths, and are there ways these strengths could be leveraged more extensively in the classroom? What opportunities for growth, if addressed, would yield the greatest improvement in teaching effectiveness?
  o Selectively review key moments or turning points in the class discussion.
  o Provide general yet actionable recommendations for future class sessions.

- Provide a copy of the completed observation form for the instructor.

Online Class Observation Interests Defined

To prepare for the classroom observation, read the following categories and questions that you will be observing.

1. Course overview and introduction
The course introduction sets the tone for the course, lets students know what to expect, and provides guidance to ensure they get off to a good start. Observe how the students respond to the instructor. Is he/she able to gain their attention by sharing interesting facts, through the use of humor, and/or by eliciting their curiosity through inquiry.

2. Learning objectives
Does the instructor preview or announce objectives that relate to key learning outcomes? Are the objectives that are announced congruent with objectives on the syllabus?

3. Assessment and measurement
Once content has been delivered, does the instructor allow time for students to actively practice? Are the assignments designed in such a manner that they demonstrate student performance or knowledge of the content? Observe and comment on the ways in which the instructor achieves this. Is it through a quiz, student activity, demonstration, inquiry, exam, homework assignment, project, etc. Assessment of learning outcomes is the key to ensuring that students are learning in your class. Observe the course's syllabus as well as the online classroom to gain an idea of how assessment is handled. Does the instructor have multiple ways of measuring or assessing learning? Rather than relying solely on a mid-term and final exam, is there evidence of other methods used throughout the course to assess student performance?

4. Instructional materials

Notice if the instructor is able to connect new topics of learning to the students' existing knowledge or previous instruction. Does he/she explain how the concept is relevant beyond the classroom? Are examples of relevance and real life application provided for the students? Observe how the content is delivered. Notice if there are a variety of teaching methods being employed. Are the methods varied in a manner that reaches diverse learning styles? Take note of some of the methods that you observe: lecture, demonstration, collaborative learning activities, small group activities, class discussion, small group discussion,

5. Learner interaction and engagement

Observe if the instructor provides students with guidance during the observation. This may be brought to light by comments made by the student, through observed behavior, and by reviewing classroom materials. Notice if the instructor presents students with useful examples that illustrate the content being delivered. Does he/she use analogies, share real-life applications, share mnemonics, and answer clarifying questions. Notice if the instructor encourages students to take responsibility of their learning while guiding them through the process of active learning, problem solving, and critical thinking. Timely and frequent feedback to students is an integral teaching strategy to ensure they can gauge their understanding of the course materials throughout the semester. Observe the manner and methods in which the instructor provides feedback to the students. Is it supportive, constructive, timely, and/or frequent?

6. Course technology

Observe whether the technology enabling the various course components facilitates the student's learning experience and is easy to use, rather than impeding the student's progress. Does the delivery of the content fit the scope of the course?

7. Learner support

Observe the support information provided to the student. Links to technical support, CNM accessibility policies and services, and CNM student support services should be provided. If the instructor is using the DL classroom structure un-modified, this information can be found in the last section of course menu under Help.

8. Accessibility

While reviewing the instructional materials, pay attention to alternative versions for auditory and visual content for hearing and visually impaired students. The text formatting and color coding in the course should serve specific instructional purposes. If the course is entirely offered in Blackboard it will employ accessible technologies for basic navigation by students with disabilities. During the pre-observation interview, discuss with the instructor how they have provided accommodations, or changed their delivery method, to help students with disabilities or different learning styles.

9. School specific item

Use this section to add any school specific teaching skills or behaviors that you want to observe for all instructors.

Observer's Comments

After you have completed the observation, review your notes and summarize your feedback to the instructor. Remember to provide feedback on what they did well and any areas that need improvement. For development areas, provide suggestions on what they could do to improve. Be specific.

Instructor's Comments

After reviewing your feedback and reflecting on the class observation allow the instructor to make comments. These could be comments on the experience as well as feedback about the observation.

Teaching Expectations

Philosophy of Teaching and Learning

We believe that learning occurs best in a positive learning environment with a teacher who serves as a facilitator of learning. The learning environment shall be physically comfortable, promote mutual trust and helpfulness, accept individual differences, and acknowledge the experience of individual learners.

We believe also that learning is promoted when the learner is ready to learn, accepts responsibility in the learning process, participates actively in the learning process, and is committed to making progress toward achieving goals

Present content to the best of your ability

▪ Be prepared for class

While preparing for your class, plan the presentation and activities to illuminate the learning objectives for the material. Plan ways to explain content clearly and make abstract concepts concrete and meaningful. Consider what questions the students may ask and be ready to answer them. Develop materials such as power points or handouts with enough time to edit and copy. Practice new activities to ensure that they go smoothly.

▪ Inform learners of objectives

Clearly communicate learning objectives to the students. You may want to start the class with an intriguing question or problem that will demonstrate the need for the learning objectives. Conveying the learning objectives motivates the students and helps them organize their thoughts so they are ready to learn. These objectives should form the basis for assessment.

▪ Use a variety of teaching and learning methods

Use varied instructional methods to accommodate different learning styles when possible. Students enter our classrooms with individual abilities, experiences, and needs. As a consequence they preferentially focus on different types of information, tend to assimilate information in different ways, and achieve understanding at different rates. Planning the delivery of information to balance learning styles such as visual vs. verbal, active vs. reflective, and sequential vs. global will reach more students and help them be successful.

- Promote active learning

Encourage students to ask questions and share ideas. Extend the quality of student thinking by asking stimulating questions that will help them compare, apply, evaluate, analyze and synthesize concepts. If possible, allow time for students to practice or explore what they have learned.

Provide a positive learning atmosphere

- Students should feel safe to ask questions and learn from their mistakes

In order to teach well, it is widely believed that one must be able to question well. Asking good questions fosters interaction between the teacher and his/her students. A large amount of student-teacher interaction promotes student achievement. However, it is important to know that not all questions achieve this. Some mistakes that teachers make during the question and answer process include the following: asking vague questions, asking trick questions, and asking questions that may be too abstract. When questions such as those mentioned are asked, students will usually not know how to respond and may answer the questions incorrectly. Thus, their feelings of failure may cause them to be more hesitant to participate in class, evoke some negative attitudes towards learning, and hinder the creation of a supportive classroom environment.

- Provides learning guidance

Students learn when our instruction allows for them to use their previous experience as a basis for new learning. For example, when an instructor begins the introduction of a new concept by having students discuss and brainstorm what they already know about the concept, students then have a framework for further learning. Adults learn best when they are shown the major features of a topic first (a "cognitive overview") so that they can incorporate this overview into what they already know. Most importantly, adult learners need their course work to be practical, learner-directed, experiential, applicable to "real world" situations and meaningful to them.

- Elicit performance

Strive to give students regular feedback; both students and instructors need to frequently assess learning. Learning objectives should measure what the learner will do, rather than what the instructor will do.

- Communicate high expectations

High expectations are important for everyone -- for the poorly prepared, for those unwilling to exert themselves, and for the bright and well motivated. Expectations are communicated not only by what students hear you say but also by the nature of assignments. Expect more and you will get more. Expecting students to perform well becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy when teachers hold high expectations.

- Project a positive attitude about students' ability to learn

  Some students exhibit a negative attitude and expect failure and difficulties; if you can project a positive attitude about the student's ability to learn, you can change the way they think. A positive attitude can help the student get rid of negative thoughts and behavior and lead to a happy and successful learning experience.

- Have a caring attitude towards students

  Both positive and negative comments influence motivation, but research consistently indicates that students are more affected by positive feedback and success. Praise builds students' self-confidence, competence, and self-esteem. If a student's performance is weak, let the student know that you believe he or she can improve and succeed over time. Many students in your class may be anxious about their performance and abilities. Be sensitive to how you phrase your comments and avoid offhand remarks that might prick their feelings of inadequacy.

- Faculty concern: Show concern for struggling students

  Failure to attain unrealistic goals can disappoint and frustrate students. Encourage students to focus on their continued improvement, not just on their grade on any one test or assignment. Help students evaluate their progress by encouraging them to critique their own work, analyze their strengths, and work on their weaknesses. For example, consider asking students to submit self-evaluation forms with one or two assignments.

- Be responsive to student needs

  Find out why students are enrolled in your course, how they feel about the subject matter, and what their expectations are. Then try to devise examples, case studies, or assignments that relate the course content to students' interests and experiences. For instance, a chemistry professor might devote some time to examining the contributions of chemistry to resolving environmental problems. Explain how the content and objectives of your course will help students achieve their educational, professional, or personal goals.

- Recognize students as individuals

  There are many roads to learning. Students bring different talents and styles of learning to college. Brilliant students in the lecture class may be all thumbs in the lab or art studio. Students rich in hands-on experience may not do so well with theory. Students need the opportunity to show their talents and learn in ways that work for them. Then they can be pushed to learn in new ways that do not come so easily.

- Be enthusiastic about your subject

An instructor's enthusiasm is a crucial factor in student motivation. If you become bored or apathetic, students will too. Typically, an instructor's enthusiasm comes from confidence, excitement about the content, and genuine pleasure in teaching. If you find yourself uninterested in the material, think back to what attracted you to the field and bring those aspects of the subject matter to life for your students. Or challenge yourself to devise the most exciting way to present the material, however dull the material itself may seem to you.

Assessing student learning

First and foremost classroom assessment is focused on improving student learning. It is an integral, formative practice of checking to ensure that students are learning in your class. Classroom assessment is an approach designed to help teachers determine what students are learning and how well they are learning it. By setting measurable learning objectives and developing a means of checking for student knowledge and/or performance you can help ensure your students are achieving the learning outcomes in order to be successful in your class and beyond. This process involves active involvement of both teacher and students. In order for assessment to be effective, feedback should be provided to students frequently and promptly. Classroom assessment should be viewed as an iterative improvement process that takes place to continuously enhance student learning. This includes checking for understanding, analyzing results, providing feedback to students, as well as making any course design changes, that may be necessary to improve learning. It is an ongoing practice that should begin at the initiation of the class and continue with frequent feedback to students throughout the semester.

Continuously Develop your Teaching Practice

To create a community of learning at CNM requires that faculty learn while they are teaching in order to continually develop their professional practice. We know that faculty have extensive content expertise and we want them to have equally developed teaching strategies to promote student success. The goal is to have our faculty develop into master instructors or facilitators of learning while they teach at CNM. As faculty develop their skills towards creating an environment of student-centered learning, we will create an environment in which learning is collaborative.

Faculty can develop their teaching practice through various methods:

- Participating in professional development courses through the Cooperative for Teaching and Learning
- External college level professional development classes related to Teaching and Learning
- Informal and Formal mentoring
- Peer Teaching observations
- Professional Learning Communities focused on Teaching and Learning
- Sharing innovative and best known practices amongst peers
- Personal mastery through becoming a reflective practitioner and continually developing one's practice
- Teaching professional development classes through the Cooperative for Teaching and Learning

- Conducting research around Teaching and Learning
- Attending and/or presenting at professional conferences to stay abreast of teaching innovations