

## SKIDMORE COLLEGE PEER OBSERVATION GUIDELINES

These guidelines were developed by the Office of the Dean of the Faculty/Vice President for Academic Affairs. Departments and programs are strongly encouraged to utilize these guidelines to guide peer observations in their units.

### *Developmental versus Evaluative Peer Observation*

There are two goals of peer observations: **developmental** (intended to provide feedback for ongoing improvement, enhanced effectiveness, and innovation in classroom instruction) and **evaluative** (observations made for the purpose of personnel decisions). Developmental peer observation should be conducted in the context of a collaborative and trusting professional relationship whose primary goal is to assist with professional development. While each form of observation complements one another, developmental observation is ongoing, and evaluative assessment occurs during specific windows during the reappointment, tenure, and promotion processes.

Skidmore College faculty have a wide variety of skill levels and approaches to the craft of teaching. Therefore, an individualized approach to developmental peer observation to best meet the needs of individual faculty is warranted. While all faculty can gain from regular feedback about their teaching, pre-tenure and newer non-tenure track faculty could potentially benefit the most from a structured plan of developmental peer observation. Therefore, it is suggested that faculty propose, in consultation with their Chair/Program Directors/Program Personnel Committee Chair (C/PD/PPCC), a developmental peer observation plan that best meets their needs. Depending on what faculty may want to learn about their teaching, developmental peer observers can come from the faculty member's home department (content- and process-related issues) or outside of the department (process-related issues). A promising practice is to pair up with a faculty member and conduct reciprocal developmental or evaluative observations. Such a model may be less intimidating to the faculty member being observed, and provides both with opportunities to learn from one another.

### *Peer Observation Process:*

Regardless of the purpose of the observation (developmental or evaluative), all peer observations should include a pre- and post-observation discussion between the teacher and the observer. The pre-observation discussion can provide the opportunity to discuss the content of the sessions to be visited in the broader course context, any specific feedback needs, and any other issues that can set the stage for a productive observation. Observers should be given a syllabus and access to course materials well before the observed session. If possible, at least two contiguous class sessions should be observed to provide the most comprehensive data. During the observation, it can be productive to use a tool or rubric (available from the Office of the DOF/VPAA) to help focus and guide the observations. The data collected using the tool/rubric would then be the focus of the post-observation discussion. During this post-observation discussion, the faculty member who was observed would take notes and then write a reflection on the observation that summarizes the discussion. This reflection would be shared with the observer for any additional feedback.

Therefore, the peer observation process has the following steps:

1. Identification of an observer (can be done in consultation with the C/PD/PPCC) or a willing partner for reciprocal observation
2. Pre-observation meeting where the purpose of the observation is explored, and the faculty member provides the observer with the syllabus and other course materials needed for a meaningful observation
3. Ideally, two classes sessions are observed contiguously

4. Post-observation meeting occurs where observer shares feedback and session are discussed. The faculty member who was observed takes notes and writes a reflection on the session that is shared with the observer within two weeks of the post-observation meeting

Some may not be able to separate developmental from evaluative feedback if the candidate is in the same department. If this is the case, developmental peer observations should be conducted solely by faculty outside of the department. If a department feels it is necessary for all faculty in the department/program who are eligible to participate in the personnel process observe the candidate, the department could consider having more than one visitor at a time come observe or videotaping class sessions (capturing both professor and student contributions) that could be viewed by all faculty in the department. Ultimately, who conducts the developmental peer observations should be under the control of the faculty member being observed.

### ***Promising Practice Guidelines:***

The following are suggestions for pre-tenure faculty and AIRs and WIRs in their first six years:

- At least one evaluative observation process (i.e. pre-meeting, at least two sequential class visits if possible, post-meeting, write-up by the observed faculty member) could be conducted by the C/PD/PPCC during the fall semester of the year prior to reappointment, and either during the fall or spring semesters of the year prior to tenure.
- C/PD/PPCC should be sensitive to the number of evaluative visits in which candidates are asked to participate. While it is promising practice that no more than three evaluative observation processes are conducted in the year before reappointment or the year before tenure, departments and programs may work with the candidate to observe more often if they feel it is vital to support the candidate through the personnel process.
- If the candidate is contractually obligated to teach in two or more departments/ programs, the candidate could consult with the C/PD/PPCCs to develop a plan to meet the minimum number of observations, and if mutually agreed upon, a plan to engage in more evaluative observations depending on the professional development needs of the candidate and desires of the department(s) or program(s).
- These guidelines are suggested minimums and maximums, and an increase in a number of evaluative observations should not be seen as an indicator of poor teaching performance. It is possible that more observations are necessary to better inform the letters that must be written at 3<sup>rd</sup> year reappointment and tenure.
- At least two developmental peer observation processes (can be inter- intra-departmental or paired) could occur before reappointment and one developmental process post-reappointment and prior to tenure (or second reappointment in the case of AIRs and WIRs). These guidelines are suggested minimums only, and faculty are encouraged to engage in more developmental peer observations to promote innovation and high quality teaching.

Full-time non-tenure track faculty in their first 6 years at Skidmore (includes Lecturers, Visiting Assistant/Associate Professors, Instructors, and Teaching Professors):

- At least one evaluative observation process could occur at least a semester before an additional contract (or renewal) is awarded.
- If the contract period is two years or more, at least one developmental peer observation process could occur sometime during the contract period and ideally prior to the evaluative observation. Full-time non-tenure track faculty can develop a plan for observations in consultation with the C/PD(s).

Post-tenure faculty, full-time non-tenure track faculty in positions longer than 6 years, and part-time faculty:

- Full-time non-tenure track faculty who have been in their positions longer than six years and have never been formally observed could engage in at least one evaluative observation process before a new contract or renewal is issued. If the new contract period is two years or more, at least one developmental peer observation process could occur sometime during the contract period and ideally prior to the evaluative observation. Full-time non-tenure track faculty may develop a plan for observations in consultation with the C/PD.
- All part-time faculty are encouraged to participate in developmental peer observation and can develop a plan with their department chair(s) and/or program directors.
- Associate Professors should consider engaging in developmental observations in order to promote high-quality teaching, and evaluative observations if they will stand for promotion. Ideally, post-tenure faculty (including both Associate and Full Professors) could engage in at least one developmental observation every six years. All faculty are encouraged to develop an Individual Faculty Development Plan and incorporate observations into a holistic professional development plan.