



**CODES OF PRACTICE  
ON  
PEER OBSERVATION**

**Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council  
University Grants Commission  
Sri Lanka**

**January 2011**

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## **FOREWORD**

The purpose of this code of practice is to provide a reference point for all universities, covering the main aspects of academic standards and the quality of education. The code reflects consensus amongst universities and other groups on the key elements of good practice, which support the student learning experience.

The main principles identified in the code of practice are:

- A clear definition of responsibilities.
- Consistent application of policies and practices that are underpinned by principles of fairness and equality of opportunity.
- The availability of clear accessible information.
- The competence of staff.
- Monitoring and review of policy, procedures and practices.
- Use of the Code of practice in audit and review.

The code may be added to overtime, to reflect developments in Universities and Nationally. Individual university will be expected to use the code to guide its own developing practice and reflect particular context and requirements of individual institution

Prof. Colin N. Peiris  
Director/QAA Council

January 2011.

## **CODE OF PRACTICE ON PEER OBSERVATION**

### **Structure of the Code**

Each code is divided into three sections, covering general principles, institutional by-laws and regulations and specific guidance. Some have additional appendices, where more details are required.

### **Development**

The codes are intended to be dynamic documents, which continue to develop over time. This will enable them to take account of national developments and to capture changing university practice.

Feedback is therefore invited on any aspect of the Codes.

### **INTRODUCTION**

All faculties of the national university system value teaching. Hence, improving instruction in the classrooms, laboratories etc. should lead to enhanced learning for the students - the ultimate goal of education. Thus, it is worthwhile for faculties and universities to sponsor and conduct a wide variety of activities and programs that encourage, recognize and reward excellence in teaching.

Many faculties practice obtaining student feedback. Peer observation would complement the practice of obtaining student feedback so that the teacher has another reliable source of information regarding the quality of his/her learning and also suggestions of how it could be improved.

What is peer observation? It is the practice where a colleague of the teacher observes him/her in the act of teaching in order to provide constructive feedback with the sheer intention of assisting the teacher in question to improve and enhance the quality of his/her teaching.

Peer observation and evaluation of the teaching program could be developed by faculties as a means to assess teaching in addition to the collection of student feedback. The term assessment is important; peer observation for teaching assessment is not an evaluation measure for summative information but a formative measure designed to help teachers improve their teaching activities.

Peer observation might be a new experience to many teachers in the university system because it is not an act which has been practiced widely or commonly. Therefore, several activities would have to be undertaken by faculties/universities before actually practicing peer observation so that the required mind set is developed by university teachers in order for them to realize the benefits of and agree to peer observation.

## **A. General Principles**

1. The term ‘peer observation’ is used in this Code of Practice to denote direct feedback given to teachers of higher education regarding individual teaching practices, course organization and content, teaching strategies adopted, planning and delivery of lessons and the general teaching and learning environment.
2. The method adopted in obtaining direct feedback to teachers at departmental/faculty/university level would be by the identification of a pool of peer teachers who would voluntarily “observe” teachers/instructors and provide constructive feedback and engage in formulating action plans for the teacher observed for the specific purpose of improving for the future,.
3. Indirect feedback such as that available from student feedback forms, analysis of examination answers and marks, external examiners, graduates and employers is not covered in these guidelines
4. The principles underlying the recommended procedures are that
  - Peer observation should occur and be seen to occur
  - They should have outcomes which are recorded collaboratively and conveyed to the teacher being observed
  - Peer observation should be repeated in order to gain the benefits of feedback and action plans generated at any one or more encounters
5. Peer observation should be systematic, taken seriously and respectful at all times of the rights of teachers.
6. Institutions should plan and take appropriate action for institutional development in the teaching/learning environment in order to maximize the results of peer observations and action plans generated from them.

## **B. Institutional By-Laws and Regulations**

1. It is suggested that the following areas should be covered in institutional by-laws and regulations and standing orders, as appropriate.
2. Appointment of a University or Faculty-level committee to monitor and improve the quality of the student learning experience through the observation, feedback and generation of action plans on teachers’ teaching/instruction and the learning environment in which they teach.
3. This committee could be a sub-committee of the Staff Development Center or the Internal Quality assurance Unit of the University, or a Faculty sub committee or Teaching Unit.
4. A policy that all teachers should be given an opportunity to be observed, whenever possible

5. That feedback could be given to them and collaborative action plans developed, for the purpose of improving their teaching.
6. That there is a link between student feedback, peer observation and institutional improvement plans.
7. Provision of data that informs the recognition and reward of good teaching

### **C. Specific Guidance**

1. The Institution should provide information to teachers regarding the purpose and outcomes of peer observation over time.
2. The Institution should arrange activities to enable teachers to learn about peer observation so that they are aware of the requirements during an observation session. These activities probably could be undertaken by the Staff Development Centers of the University.
3. The Institution should make provisions and facilitate the peer observation sessions so that teachers are encouraged to practice peer observation – eg. Provision of time tables to staff members.
4. It is recommended that departmental meetings and Faculty Boards have peer observation as an agenda item so that members pay due attention to this activity as a means to improve the teaching/learning situation at Universities.
5. It should also take action to address concerns that arise out of peer observation feedback.
6. The feedback and action plans of peer observation sessions should be preserved and documented so that improvements could be analyzed over time.
7. If according to the feedback, certain institutional developments are necessary in order to improve the teaching activities of teachers, departments and faculties should pay attention to such requirements – especially if they are of physical nature, so that teachers are convinced that it is beneficial to undergo peer observation.
8. Action should be taken by Departments and Faculties, to appreciate and reward teachers who do improve their teaching by a concerted effort at peer observation.
9. Even though peer observation sessions would be conducted at predetermined times, teachers should be genuinely interested in this activity to improve their teaching and not “act” for that particular session only. A clear understanding about the rationale of peer observation would enable teachers to acquire this mind set with no difficulty.
10. Since peer observation sessions and the overall exercise is aimed at improving teaching, administering a questionnaire where responses on a scale ( 1-5) are given is not encouraged at all. The observation of a session should be “open ended” for more collaborative action between teacher and observer for improved teaching and not “close ended” where the observation results are taken as a final result.
11. Activities where teachers and observers are trained to give and receive feedback would be extremely useful prior to peer observation. Such activities could be conducted by the Staff Development Center or Teaching Units of Faculties.

12. As far as possible a common procedure should be developed by the University for peer observation so that all teachers of different Faculties feel they are treated alike and reap similar benefits out of this very valuable exercise.
13. Teachers who are observed and observer teachers should be given due recognition and appreciation for their time and effort in participating in peer observation as a means of improving the teaching quality of a Faculty/University.
14. Activities could be organized where teachers who have undergone peer observation could share their experiences with others for mutual benefit and further improvement of the teaching/learning scenario in Universities.

### **Peer observation of Teaching – guidelines to the 5 part system**

#### **Practice Observation**

1. It is important that observers are volunteers or appointed by the head of a department/faculty/teaching unit with consensus on both sides about the willingness to observe – which would mean that they are ready to give their time and attention to a worthy cause.
2. Hence it would be necessary that the observers have been given some training with regard to the peer observation concept. This initial exposure to the concept could be conducted by the Staff Development Center of the same university or another University where individuals have had some training on teaching methodology.
3. It is necessary that the observer wants to gain a “sense” of being in someone else’s classroom and the instructor wants to become comfortable with having an observer in the classroom..
4. Thus it is important and advisable that teachers are encouraged to “sit in” on other’s classes as a warm-up to the actual peer observation system.
5. Therefore it would be very useful for the faculty/university to draw up a pool of volunteer observers. This again could be facilitated by the SDCs.

#### ***Part 1: Identification***

1. This component of the peer observation system is designed to help participants understand the instructional goals associated with a particular course, session and instructor
2. Setting the instructional goals would later enable both parties to establish the specific teaching elements for feedback to instructor.
3. It is not advisable to conduct peer observation unannounced or unscheduled as both parties (observer and instructor) would not be aware of the setting nor the aspects that require observation.
4. Hence peer observation schedules must be drawn up in advance so that both parties have acquired the ‘mind set” necessary for the activity.
5. The identification stage also gives the instructor the opportunity to provide the observer the opportunity to understand the context of the course, so that the observer can look for areas where the instructor would need help.
6. The goals of the lesson under observation would include learner behaviors ( what the learners would be able to do as a result of the class and instruction) and the teaching strategies ( what the teacher will do to help ensure student learning)

### ***Part 2: Dialogue One***

1. This is the stage for a pre-observation conference to help the observer understand the context for the instructor's particular class.
2. The primary goal of this first meeting would be to engage in a dialogue to review the instructor's course/class goals, teaching strategies, learning objectives, past problems, perceived strengths etc.
3. This meeting will serve to identify the elements where the instructor needs the most help.
4. Another result of this dialogue would be to collaboratively identify any parts of the classroom experience that the observer feels are necessary for observation.
5. "What to look for" should be decided by both parties and be based on previous observations.
6. If this is the first observation, it would be useful if the instructor can provide some clues and areas about the aspects that need observation. These could be based on information received during student feedback or other feedback mechanisms.
7. The first dialogue will also identify the role the observer will take during the observation.

### ***Part 3: The Observation***

1. The actual observation is the primary part of the system designed to improve teaching
2. By this time, the observer and the teacher/instructor would have discussed what specific behaviors the instructor wants the observer to look for during the class session.
3. The observer will be in the unique position to gather more and richer information than the instructor can.
4. For the instructor to make effective teaching- related decisions, the observer's data collection must be
  - Specific
  - Accurate
  - Descriptive
  - Contain irrefutable evidence
  - Relate to the goals that are defined by the teacher being observed
5. The observation should be guided by the specific teaching elements as defined in the pre-observation dialogue

### ***Part 4: Dialogue Two***

1. The post observation dialogue is designed to allow the teacher and observer to review the observations regarding the goal/s the instructor set for that day's class session.
2. Hence the second dialogue should focus on helping the faculty member to understand the events that transpired during the observed class session.
3. The dialogue should take place as close to the time of observation as possible.
4. In order for the instructor to make effective changes to teaching, peer feedback should be
  - Specific
  - Focused
  - Concrete
  - Action oriented
  - Accurate
  - Clear
  - Honest
  - Positively phrased

### ***Part 5 : Post Observation Write-ups and Action Plans***

1. The peer observation write-up should generate a set of action steps that will positively affect the instructor's teaching.
2. Also, since it is a result of the dialogue between the observer and the observed, it should be written collaboratively
3. This document should be
  - Descriptive
  - Not evaluative
  - Specific
  - Focused on behavior
  - Take in to account the needs of the receiver and giver of feedback
  - Focused to include only the amount of information the receiver can process.
4. The action steps should serve as a basis for follow-up observations
5. In particular, an observer could look for changes in an instructor's teaching based on the agreed upon action steps from the previous observation.
6. Therefore multiple observations will be required to gain an accurate picture of the evolution of teaching over time.

### **Peer Observation Analysis**

1. Departments/Faculties should decide for themselves how to achieve the most effective analysis from the peer observation sessions conducted for their teachers.
2. Since the peer observations are mainly for formative feedback, the analysis would be mostly qualitative.
3. Teachers should be encouraged to discuss their feedback and action plans with colleagues so that at times collective decisions could be taken for teaching improvement especially if the physical infrastructure of the teaching environment needs improvement.
4. Faculties and Universities should strive to provide necessary improvements requested by teachers after peer observation analyses so that teachers are encouraged for future participation of such activities. Prolonged neglect of such requests would only leave teachers with a sense of frustration and no confidence in the exercise

## **ANNEXES: SAMPLE FORMATS**

Teacher/Instructor Name .....

Observer Name.....

Date of Observation.....

Course and Lesson.....

### **Practice Observation**

**To gain a ‘sense’ of someone else’s classroom, gather information about**

Class Syllabus

- Cohesive
- Understandable
- Clear expectations
- Accurate

Classroom Environment

- Walls/lighting/seating/layout
- Technology
- General atmosphere

Teacher Qualities

Preparedness

- On time
- Room ready
- Notes/lesson plan

Presentation Skills

- Introduction/presentation
- Pace/timing/clarity
- Participation/feedback
- Direction giving

Instructional Qualities

- Student centered/active learning techniques
- Checking for understanding/reinforcement of ideas/application of material

## **Part 1: Identification**

“Setting the Goals”

**To help the observer understand the purpose of the observation, the teacher/instructor should prepare answers to the following questions**

What are the goals/aims of this course?

What are the goals/aims and learning objectives of the specific class?

What teaching strategies would be used to achieve these class goals?

What aspects of my teaching do I want feedback on?

## **Part 2: Dialogue One**

“Understanding the context”

**To understand the class context, the observer should ask the faculty member questions such as**

1. What is the aim of today’s class? What are the aims of the course?
2. Lesson plan
3. Curriculum outline
4. Class syllabus
5. Any issues from previous student feedback
6. What type of course is this – theory/ theory and practical/ seminar/ project/other  
core/ advanced/ compulsory/optional  
first year/ second year .....  
Length of session/lecture/practical/activity/  
Number of times per week
7. Recent changes in program/course/student outcomes
8. What knowledge, skills and attitudes does the instructor expect from students  
As a result of the course.....  
As a result of the session.....
9. What is the student make-up of the instructor’s class – number of  
students/background/other
10. What type of technology is used in this class?
11. What, if any, concerns does the instructor have regarding this course?
12. What type of teaching strategies would be used in today’s class?
13. What components of your teaching would you like me to be especially aware of during  
today’s session?

As the final step in the pre-observation dialogue, the teacher and observer will need to agree on the specific behaviors to be observed. These specifics should be the culmination of all of the pre-observation work that was done by both parties.

### Part 3: The Observation

The actual observation is the primary part of the system to improve teaching. The observer and teacher will have discussed what specific behaviors the instructor wants the observer to look for during the class session.

The manner in which the data collection must be stated was explained earlier.

The observation should be guided by the specific teaching elements as defined in the pre-observation dialogue.

When observing teaching, collect data related to the learning objectives for that day's session.

Objectives .....  
.....  
.....

Observed behaviors	Specific Feedback

### Part 4: Dialogue Two

The post observation dialogue is designed to allow the teacher and observer to review the observation regarding the goal(s) the teacher set for that day's class session. As such, this second dialogue should focus on helping the faculty member to understand the events that transpired during the observed class session.

Guidelines for the peer feedback, so that the instructor can make effective changes to their teaching has been stated earlier in this document.

### Part 5: Post-Observation Write-ups and Action Plans

The peer observation write-up generates a set of action steps that will positively affect an instructor's teaching. It is a result of the dialogue between the observer and the observed, and should be written collaboratively.

The action steps should serve as a basis for follow-up observations. In successive observations in particular, an observer could look for changes in an instructor's teaching based on the agreed upon action steps from previous observations. Therefore multiple observations will be required to gain an accurate picture of the evolvement of teaching over time.

When documenting a peer observation, make sure to include (as a minimum)

- The agreed upon specific teaching aspects under observation
- The teacher's teaching goals for that day
- Specific teacher behaviors related to these goals.
- Specific student behaviors related to these goals
- Areas in which the observer believes the instructor has improved
- Areas that could be further improved
- Action plan for change
- General positive comments