



Teaching Partners Program

Teaching Partners Program is a peer mentoring program designed to promote excellence in teaching. Faculty peer mentors meet periodically to share teaching practices. A centerpiece of the program is classroom peer observations. Teaching Partners participants attend a workshop to learn procedures for planning a classroom observation and providing useful formative feedback to a peer. This page provides information about the program and tells you how to join the Teaching Partners group.

The Teaching Partners Program is designed to:

- Encourage the development and exchange of successful and novel teaching practices at UWF.
- Fulfill UWF's strategic priority to *foster student learning and development to include the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that optimize students' prospects for personal and professional success.*
- Facilitate peer reviews of teaching.
- Supplement departmental mentoring programs.
- Provide a mechanism for creating a teaching mentor component for faculty who wish to develop a mutual mentoring team.

Program Participation

Faculty who are interested in participating should attend the Teaching Partners Peer Observation Workshop, held every September, (see CUTLA workshop calendar for date, time and location) to learn about the program and how to do a class observation, meet current and former participants and identify a teaching partner.

For more information about connecting with a Teaching Partner, please call or email Lori Glaze at 473-7435 or lglaze@uwf.edu.

How to Find a Good Teaching Partner

Identify your needs and questions about teaching. If your questions focus on the content of your discipline, (Are my courses appropriately challenging? Is the pace of the class appropriate for students at this level?) then you should seek a teaching mentor from your discipline.

However, if you want to discuss teaching strategies and issues of classroom management, a good mentor might be found in any discipline. A teaching mentor from a discipline other than your own can be an effective Teaching Partner because faculty from a different discipline will not necessarily have to focus on issues such as instructional strategies and establishing classroom rapport. An out-of-field mentor can more easily provide you with feedback about whether your explanations of content are understandable to a non-expert in the discipline.

Seek a Teaching Partner with experience in the types of teaching strategies you want to discuss: engaging students in an online course, facilitating discussion in small classes, engaging students in large classes, managing projects in laboratory classes, or contrasts between undergraduate and graduate teaching.

Classroom Observation Process

The program will run through the fall and spring semesters. At the beginning of the fall semester, each participant will identify another faculty member as a peer mentor based on shared teaching interests and goals. During the semester, faculty partners will visit each other's face-to-face or online classes to learn about and review their teaching practices. Faculty should visit each other's classes at least once, but many Teaching Partners schedule additional visits. Effective classroom observations generally follow the following three-step process:

1. Pre-Visit Meeting

Setting up a meeting prior to the classroom visit is critical to the success of the observation process. The purpose of this meeting is for the observer to get familiar with the class, students, teacher's goals, context, and expectations for the classroom visit. The teaching partners also determine the logistics (e.g., where will the observer sit, will the observer be introduced, etc.) for the classroom visit. The observer may complete the Pre-Observation Discussion Form, which is available from the Teaching Partners web site, during this meeting. In addition, the observer and instructor should agree upon the most appropriate feedback and evaluation instruments for their classroom visits, or adapt one of the forms to suit their needs. Several forms are provided on the web site, including open-ended feedback and scaled evaluation forms.

2. Classroom visit

The classroom visit should occur as planned between the observer and teacher, and the logistics for the visit should be determined in advance. The visit will depend on the nature of the class, e.g., face-to-face class, lab, online class, etc. For online classes, the observer may visit one of the instructor's synchronous sessions (e.g., sessions conducted using Elluminate). The observer may complete one of the Classroom Observation Forms available on the Teaching Partners web site, to collect feedback during the visit. The agreed upon instruments should be used for the classroom observation.

3. Follow-up meeting

This meeting should be scheduled within a week of the classroom visit, and the observer may complete a Classroom Observation Report prior to this meeting. Several formats for this report are available on the web site. Faculty should select the format that is most appropriate for their visit. As a formative evaluation of teaching, the follow-up discussion between the teaching partners should provide reflective insights about the classroom observation. The meeting provides an opportunity for partners to discuss the observer's feedback, instructor's comments, and impact on student learning. Ideally, feedback should focus on positive teaching achievements, as well as identify areas for reflection or further development. Partners can share what they learned from the process, how the teaching practices can be improved, and, if applicable, how they can be adapted for use by the observer.

If the classroom visits for both teaching partners are scheduled close enough together, one pre-visit and one follow-up meeting may be used to discuss both visits.

Teaching Partners can request campus food vouchers so they can have their discussions over a lunch. All feedback related to individual peer observations and classroom visits will remain confidential between the teaching partners.

Guidelines for Peer Classroom Observations

Types of Peer Review

Peer reviews of teaching can be used for both formative and summative evaluations. Teaching partners should share their feedback to improve teaching practices (formative evaluation). If requested by a partner, observers can provide an evaluation of teaching for use in performance evaluations (summative evaluation).

Formative Evaluation

Formative evaluation of teaching focuses on activities that provide faculty with information that they can use to improve their teaching. The information is intended for their personal use, and is thus private and confidential. The feedback should be sufficiently detailed to help teachers gain insight into the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching. Formative peer evaluations are informal and can include classroom observations or review of course materials. Such evaluations can help faculty improve their teaching skills and assess their success with new teaching approaches.

Summative Evaluation

Summative evaluation of teaching focuses on collecting information needed to make performance decisions about one's teaching. Consequently, the information included is often more general and comparative in nature than the data used for formative evaluation. It may include teaching ratings or rankings, or comparative information which enables the reviewer to determine the quality of the teaching with respect to the performance of other peers. A single classroom observation is not sufficient for a summative evaluation of teaching. Summative evaluations should include all peer evaluations of teaching and should include a critical review of course materials, student course evaluations, and other data.

The following guidelines will help improve the usefulness and quality of the peer review process:

1. Teaching partners should discuss and agree in advance on the process and purpose of the peer review, as well as the instruments that will be used for the review.
2. The process from start to end should be an active collaboration between the teaching partners.
3. Good peer reviews involve being honest and constructive. The observations should be conducted in a collegial and private manner; instructors should not feel anxious about feedback that they are less than excellent. The feedback should focus on improvement.
4. Confidentiality in a formative review must be maintained, and trust must be established between the two partners.
5. Peer review should focus on specific teaching practices or materials (e.g., teaching strategy, organization of lecture, interaction with students, communication of content, etc.).
6. Pre-observation information is essential to provide context about the class, teacher, and students. It may be best to obtain this information in a face-to-face meeting.
7. A variety of approaches and instruments may be used to focus the classroom observation. Teaching partners should identify the process and instruments that are most appropriate for the context of their visits in advance. A variety of instruments and resources are available on the Teaching Partners web site.
8. The observer should be as unobtrusive as possible during the class visit. The instructor may introduce the observer at the start of class if necessary, but the observer should avoid making comments or engaging in any behavior that may impact the students' behavior.
9. Post-visit feedback using an appropriate form or report should be provided in a timely manner, preferably in the form of a face-to-face meeting.
10. Feedback should be based on reasoned opinions, not personal biases or judgments. A good peer review requires reflection.
11. Build on strengths. It is easy to determine what needs work. Be sure to identify what went well.
12. The time invested in peer review can pay off through contributions to teaching development and improvement, the scholarship of teaching and learning, and new collaborations with colleagues.
13. A single classroom observation is not sufficient for a summative evaluation of teaching.
14. In their roles as reviewers, both teaching partners can benefit from the peer review process. Ideas to improve or adapt their own teaching are likely to develop from observing as well as from being observed.