

Recommendations for Online Course Evaluation

Submitted by the English Department's LSE Subcommittee for Online Teaching and Learning

Rationale: Teaching observations that occur in face-to-face courses are restricted to that class visitation only; observers experience the class the way students experience it. Observations of online courses typically occur by the instructor giving the observer access to their class by adding them to the section as a teacher; the observer then has full rein to view all parts of the instructor's course without context and does not experience the course the way students do. Student privacy can be violated (observers can see grades, instructor response to writing, their contributions to discussion); in a face-to-face class, students writing is not reviewed, and students can choose not to participate when they know the instructor is being evaluated. The mode we are proposing suggests that an instructor prepare to show the observer, in person, one area of their course (e.g., one week, one unit, one content section or checklist), which is more comparable to a face-to-face observation.

Proposal: Online courses should be observed using the following model:

1. The instructor and the observer should set up a mutually agreed upon meeting time.
2. The instructor will pull up their online course on a computer screen.
3. The instructor will provide a "tour" of the course the way that students experience it, focusing on one section (e.g., one week, one unit, one checklist, etc), or more if they choose.
4. The observer will take notes and can ask questions as the tour is occurring.
5. Following the tour, the instructor and observer will have a discussion, as required by the CBA.
6. The instructor should plan to provide to the observer screenshots and/or other materials in hard copy or electronically to help the observer write the observation.

Notes:

- Several faculty teaching online have been using this model and agree that it works much better toward giving observers a fuller picture of how an online course functions.
- An instructor should have the choice whether to use this model or the "add to the course" model. If an instructor would prefer to add the instructor to the course, they can.
- Does this give the instructor unfair influence over an evaluation? We argue it does not. In a face-to-face observation, an instructor is able to meet with an observer after their class to discuss concerns, and the instructor is also able to ask an observer to make changes to an observation (these activities could also be seen as "influence"); this process is not very different. The observer would also be able to ask to see specific parts of the course.
- Scott Warnock* and his colleagues have developed a model for evaluating hybrid courses that is similar to what we are proposing, and they have some good reasons why it's effective. [Click here to view their model.](#)

*Scott Warnock is the Director of University Writing at Drexel, author of *Teaching Writing Online* (NCTE, 2009) and countless articles on Online Writing Instruction (OWI), as well as a member of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) standing committee on OWI, which has authored the [Position Statement of Principles and Effective Practices in Online Writing Instruction](#).