



Formalized Classroom Observation as Part of Faculty Appraisal

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Background

Southeast Community College (SCC) has recently undergone an overhaul in its approach to what was formerly known as Annual Performance Review for faculty. In the past, the process consisted of a once-a-year meeting between instructor and supervisor. The College used a generic form for this review which consisted of areas of assessment centering on instructors' attendance and punctuality, their quantity of work, their initiative, and their "job knowledge." The form for faculty was the same used to assess performance of support staff, maintenance workers, and student services personnel.

Faculty Appraisal

In revising the procedure for Performance Review, two significant changes were made. First, the College decided to create a distinct form and procedure for faculty (now known as "Faculty Appraisal"), one which focuses teaching and learning as much if not more than the performance of more non-essential duties. Additionally, the College's governing board had requested that periodic formal observation of instructors be included as part of the review process. Though official Faculty Appraisals are now only completed once every three years for non-probationary faculty (still once a year for probationary), faculty are observed in the classroom by their supervisors at least once a year. Included in the observation cycle are pre- and post-observation conferences between faculty member and

supervisor. Summary reports of the observations are included on the formal Faculty Appraisal form that becomes part of the faculty member's permanent personnel file.

Observation Team

A College-wide team consisting of the Vice President for instruction, deans, and program chairs was put together to research and propose a classroom observation form and process. The team began with discussions about what we wanted classroom observation at SCC to be, to achieve. Team members went into this task acutely aware of the baggage supervisory observation can bring with it: As Dudney (2002), in "Facilitating Teacher Development through Supervisory Class Observations," explains, "Many of us consider supervisory class observations as a painful requirement, with a high degree of ambiguity, discomfort & [sic] anxiety on the part of both the supervisor & the observed teacher. This feeling is usually aggravated if observations are done randomly & without much communication between the observer & teacher both before & after the observation" (p. 3).

As such, we quickly decided though a summative report would be needed for the new Appraisal process, the Classroom Observation process needed to be formative in nature. As explained by The Center for Effective Teaching at Learning at the University of Texas-El Paso (CETaL), "the distinction is between forms of evaluation that are aimed prospectively and retrospectively" (n.pag.). Formative evaluation examines instructors' strengths and weaknesses with an eye toward helping them improve and shaping their professional development goals. Formative evaluation manifests itself as feedback. Summative evaluation, on the other hand, is "primarily retrospective" and focuses on the

documenting of habits, achievements, and the results of professional development activities, and it manifests itself as “evidence” (CETaL).

The Form

The team decided the form and process for the annual observations needed to be a cooperative, non-threatening, formative process, designed to both recognize best practice in action, and identify areas of potential growth and improvement. A summative report to document the process of each observation would be included with the Appraisal Form submitted every three years. Team members then gathered samples of classroom observation documents already in use in other institutions to review and discuss, compile and delete, adapt and modify. Through several meetings and discussion, criteria for classroom observations were established, language of the descriptions of those criteria labored over, and a forms to be used as worksheets for the observer during the observation and to document the summative results were created. The forms were piloted by members of the Observation Team in real classrooms and subsequently revised for enhanced clarity and user-friendliness.

The Process

The Team’s next task was to determine the best practice and process for conducting the observations. Many considerations were raised including: who should do the observations, how they would be trained, whether the classroom visits should be announced to the instructor ahead of time, the duration of the visits, the role of the

observer, the need for and function of pre- and post-observation conferences, and the best use of the forms.

The new Performance Appraisal and Classroom Observation process have been in place since July 2006 and have so far met with significant positive response from observers and faculty. We believe we have constructed a system of formalized Classroom Observation that is well integrated into to Performance Appraisal, and therefore mutually beneficial to both faculty and supervisors. The system provides supervisors with a summative accounting of the quality of teaching, and affords faculty a formative assessment and goal setting occasion that is both recognition of quality teaching and an opportunity for professional growth.

Attendees of this session will gain:

- A description of the team's process/rationale for the creation, development, and implementation of the observation process and instrument.
- A copy of the Classroom Observation form (rubric).
- A "Resource Manual" on the use of the form.
- An established model training session.
- Sample SUPERVISOR GUIDELINES that describe the process used for probationary and non-probationary faculty.

References

Center for Effective Teaching and Learning at the University of Texas-El Paso. (n.d.)

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