What is peer observation?

Alabi and Weare (2014) define two types of peer observation. Formative evaluation is intended for "personal use," rather than public inspection, and is private and confidential. Summative evaluation is intended for public review and is often a requirement of a tenure or permanent status process (p. 181). The UMD Libraries' peer teaching observation program is formative –being observed and observing are optional, and the process remains confidential between the two parties.

Peer teaching observations are a collaborative process, in which colleagues observe each other with the intention of sharing instructional experiences. Librarians who participate in a peer observation program should approach the process with growth mindset and be committed to both giving and receiving constructive criticism. Teaching observations are not intended to be punitive or judgmental. Instead, the process should be a positive, productive, and affirmative experience for both observers and observees.

Best Practices for Peer Observation:

1. When deciding to participate in peer observations, approach the process with an open-ness to new ideas, willingness to receive critical feedback, and commitment to prioritizing the growth and development of students.

2. When inviting someone into your classroom, be sure to choose someone you respect, whose motivations you trust, and who will maintain confidentiality (p. 184).

3. When choosing a suitable partner, consider colleagues with similar instructional responsibilities, but do not discount librarians in other departments, faculty in other academic units, and professionals from your center for teaching and learning (p. 185).

4. When engaging in peer review of teaching, provide your observer with the context for the session, goals for the teaching observation, your teaching philosophy, and the degree of criticism you would like to receive (p. 186).

5. Ask your observer to focus on an aspect of teaching that you think you should address. Giving your observer a specific focus allows him/her to pay careful attention to what you are most interested in improving (p. 187)

6. When inviting a colleague to participate in peer review of teaching, make sure that you both set aside adequate time for the process: time for the pre-observation meeting, time for the observation itself, and perhaps most importantly, time for feedback and reflection during the post-observation discussion (p. 188).

References:

Alabi, J. & W. Weare. (2014). Peer review of teaching: Best practices for a non-programmatic approach. *Communications in Information Literacy, 8*(2), 180-191.

To participate in the (pilot) peer observation program:

1. To volunteer to participate in the pilot program, please complete the form available at: https://go.umd.edu/peerobservation

2. Contact a librarian to schedule an observation. While it is recommended that you participate in reciprocal observation (where you observe each other) – you can also schedule an independent observation, in which you either observe, or request to be observed. For a list of interested instructors, visit: https://go.umd.edu/participants

3. At least 72 hours before your scheduled observation, please complete the pre-observation form at: https://go.umd.edu/preobservation. The pre-observation form includes,

   - Details about the session (learning outcomes, special circumstances of which the observer might need to be aware)
   - Goals for the observation (which areas should the observer focus on, what kinds of feedback are you seeking)

4. During the observation, be respectful of any boundaries that the observee has set in the pre-observation form by focusing on the areas in which s/he has requested feedback. While you may utilize one of the optional observation forms (Appendix A, B, and C) to guide the process, please confirm with the observee before the session.

5. After the observation, schedule a time to meet in person to discuss feedback and reflect on the experience. It is recommended that you schedule the reflection session within a week of the observation. While it is the responsibility of the observer to guide the conversation, the reflection should be positive and collaborative, with each participant feeling a sense of agency and ownership over the process. Suggestions for discussion questions include,

   - What do you think went well during the session? What were you proud of?
   - What did you struggle with during the session?
   - Were there points at which you felt students were disengaged, or lost focus?
   - What would you do differently if you taught this same session again?

6. After your observation reflection session with your partner, please take a few moments to reflect on the process by completing the short form at: https://go.umd.edu/pilotreflection. This will help us improve the process moving forward!

7. Any thoughts along the way? Send an email to instruction council at lib-ic@umd.edu

Appendix A: Session Timeline

Please provide a breakdown of how much time was devoted to each portion of the session (introduction, group activity, database demonstrations, assessment, etc…)

Description	Start Time	End Time

General Comments or Feedback:

Appendix B: Behaviors Rubric

Place a checkmark and level of mastery for each behavior observed

✓	**Behaviors**			
	Spoke loudly and clearly.	More emphasis suggested	Accomplished most of the time	Very effective in this area
	Engaged students by moving throughout classroom, making eye contact, etc.	More emphasis suggested	Accomplished most of the time	Very effective in this area
	Periodically checked for understanding; encouraged questions.	More emphasis suggested	Accomplished most of the time	Very effective in this area
	Utilized active learning strategies.	More emphasis suggested	Accomplished most of the time	Very effective in this area
	Avoiding library jargon when possible. When necessary, explained terms.	More emphasis suggested	Accomplished most of the time	Very effective in this area
	Used example to illustrate ideas or demonstrate new concepts.	More emphasis suggested	Accomplished most of the time	Very effective in this area
	Session was well organized and content presented in a logical order	More emphasis suggested	Accomplished most of the time	Very effective in this area
	Devoted enough time to each activity and session did not feel rushed	More emphasis suggested	Accomplished most of the time	Very effective in this area
	Provided context throughout the session, explained why actions were taken	More emphasis suggested	Accomplished most of the time	Very effective in this area
	Instructional materials (course guides, handouts) added values to the session	More emphasis suggested	Accomplished most of the time	Very effective in this area
	Made an effort to assess learning and gauge effectiveness of session	More emphasis suggested	Accomplished most of the time	Very effective in this area

General Comments or Feedback:

Appendix C: Open-Ended Feedback Form

Engagement

What evidence did you see of the instructor making clear the material's value and relevance?

Strengths	Questions / Considerations

What evidence did you see of the instructor engaging students during the session?

Strengths	Questions / Considerations

Facilitation

What aspects of organization, delivery, or facilitation drew your attention?

Strengths	Questions / Considerations

What evidence did you observe of the class climate being a good fit for students' social, emotional, or intellectual needs?

Strengths	Questions / Considerations

Learning

What evidence did you see of students integrating and applying skills they were acquiring?

Strengths	Questions / Considerations

Other

Any general comments or feedback?

Strengths	Questions / Considerations

Please keep a copy of this confirmation page for your records

Librarian Observed: _____

Librarian Observer: _____

Date of observation: _____

Observation forms utilized:

    Session Timeline

    Behaviors Rubric

    Open-Ended Feedback Form

    Other_____

Date of reflection session: _____

General comments or feedback: