

University of Kentucky
Department of Political Science
Policy on Evaluating Teaching
The policy below was passed at the faculty meeting on 03/21/2021

The department of Political Science is aligned with the College Policy on Evaluating Teaching:

“The College recognizes that evaluating faculty teaching success should rest on a broad portfolio comprising multiple forms of evidence. This position is in keeping with national best practices and is especially concerned to not give undue influence to student teaching evaluations which can be skewed by numerous biases including those associated with gender and race. It also recognizes that much of ‘teaching’ takes place outside the classroom, in the behind the scenes work of preparing, grading, assessing, planning, meeting students, leading field trips, organizing speakers, and so on. The goal ultimately is to create a more robust process for recognizing and rewarding excellent teaching and to support a culture of reflective teaching across the college.”

Consistent with the College policy, the department recognizes that evaluating teaching is a formative process that should include:

1. Faculty self-assessments
2. Student evaluations, including quantitative measures and written comments
3. Professional teaching activities
4. Formative and constructive peer observation by department colleagues

We recognize that items 1-3 above are integrated into the FMER process. The department policy will be to use the FMER as documentation of these items.

Regarding peer observations, some clarity about College policies is warranted. First, the College’s policy on “Probationary Faculty Mentoring” requires that a faculty mentor attend “two or three of the probationary faculty member’s classes per year.”¹ There should be no record of these observations. We refer to these as “informal observations” below. Second, the “College Policy on Evaluating Teaching” requires a formal assessment that becomes official documentation that is submitted through the FMER process and may be compiled for P&T dossiers. We refer to these as “formal observations” below.

Informal observations: Informal observations are required for all probationary faculty. Informal observations will happen twice each year. They will be conducted by the probationary faculty’s mentorship committee. It is the chair’s responsibility to define who will do observations and in which term at the beginning of each academic year. Observers are expected to work with probationary faculty to choose observation dates. No documentation should come from informal observations.

Tenured faculty may request informal observations at any point and should be expect such requests to be granted. Upon request, chairs should work with tenured faculty to decide who should observe and when it should happen. No documentation should come from informal observations.

¹ <https://www.as.uky.edu/probationary-faculty-mentoring>

Formal observations:

Regarding item 4, peer observations, the department's policy is the following:

- Who gets evaluated? Consistent with the college policy, “Peer teaching evaluations will be required once a year for lecturers and untenured Regular and Special Title Series faculty; and may be requested by either the faculty member, the department chair, or the dean beyond that minimum. Peer observation of senior lecturers and tenured associate and full professors will occur by the request of either the faculty member, the department chair, or the dean.”
- How will this be documented? Consistent with the college policy, “These observations will be included in the FMER process and ultimately compiled for inclusion in promotion dossiers.” It will be the faculty member's responsibility to include evaluations in their FMER.
- Who does the evaluation? In the fall, the chair will consult with the faculty member to be evaluated and their Primary Mentor (where applicable). That discussion will result in a mutually agreed-upon, tenured faculty member to do the evaluation. The faculty member doing the observation can be the Primary Mentor. The chair will be responsible for notifying the person who will do the evaluation and assuring that they understand the process.
- When will the evaluation happen? The evaluation should happen after the two required informal observations have taken place, so likely in the second half of the spring term.
- How will the process work? There will be several steps for the peer evaluation:
 1. The evaluator works with the faculty member to identify an ideal date to conduct the evaluation. The date should be set at least a week in advance of the evaluation.
 2. The evaluator reviews course syllabi and other teaching materials in advance of the class observation.
 3. The evaluator meets with the faculty member prior to visiting the class to ascertain the context and goals of the class being observed.
 4. The evaluator visits the class and uses the evaluation form (see the end of this document) for assessment.
 5. The evaluator has a follow up discussion with the instructor.
 6. The evaluator completes the “Peer Teaching Evaluation Form” and then provides the instructor with the written evaluation. The instructor has the option of providing comments on the form.
 7. The instructor sends the documentation to the department chair and includes it in the subsequent FMER.

Department of Political Science
Peer Teaching Evaluation Form

Instructor being evaluated:

Faculty observer:

Term:

Date observed:

Course observed:

Course enrollment:

Course content: The department expects instructors to present courses that challenge students appropriately in terms of reading requirements, exams, course assignments, etc. Based on your review of course materials, please use specific examples to indicate how well the instructor meets this expectation.

[insert comments here]

Diversity and inclusion in course content: The department expects instructors to make a concerted effort to assure that students learn from a diverse array of scholarship and scholars. Based on your review of course materials, please use specific examples to indicate how well the instructor meets this expectation.

[insert comments here]

Instructor preparation and organization: The department expects the instructor to demonstrate appropriate preparation and organization of the course material, content, and class session. Based on your observation, please use specific examples to indicate how well the instructor meets this expectation.

[insert comments here]

Instructional strategies: The department expects instructors to employ an appropriate variety of instructional strategies to accomplish class goals. Based on your observation, please use specific examples to indicate how well the instructor meets this expectation.

[insert comments here]

Content knowledge: The department expects instructors to demonstrate relevant content knowledge, using important and current information. Based on your observation, please use specific examples to indicate how well the instructor meets this expectation.

[insert comments here]

Presentation skills: The department expects instructors to present material in a manner that effectively conveys the information to the students. Based on your observation, please use specific examples to indicate how well the instructor meets this expectation.

[insert comments here]

Clarity: The department expects instructors to use examples, make clear explanations and answers to student questions, and define and elaborate on terms. Based on your observation, please use specific examples to indicate how well the instructor meets this expectation.

[insert comments here]

Overall: Please comment upon any specific strengths or avenues for growth that were not covered in the items above.

[insert comments here]

Instructor comments/response: If desired, the instructor may use the box below to offer any comments regarding the observation, including any areas of agreement or disagreement.

[insert comments here]