

**Auburn University
College of Agriculture
Guidelines for Peer Review of Teaching
Spring 2006 (revised)**

The purpose of peer review of teaching is long-term support and continuous professional development of teaching faculty. Although this document will outline guidelines for the process of peer review of teaching, each department should establish their own protocol for peer review that is based on these guidelines. Peer review is strongly recommended, but not required, for all courses an instructor teaches. Peer review should be considered only one of many different ways that teaching effectiveness can be evaluated. *The emphasis on peer review should be on its value to the instructor, the process should be instructor-driven, and the results should be the property of the instructor.*

The main use of peer review should be for *formative* evaluation. Within the context of faculty evaluation, the term *formative evaluation* describes activities that are to provide faculty with information that they can use to improve their teaching. The information is intended for their personal use, rather than for public inspection, and thus is private and confidential. The information should be rich enough in detail so that instructors can obtain clear insights on the nature of their teaching strengths and weaknesses. Formative evaluation is informal, ongoing, and wide-ranging. It should be the basis for continuous development of effective teaching throughout the career¹.

Peer review of teaching should also be designed for use in a *summative evaluation* so that faculty can use the results of the process to enhance their chances of success in personnel decisions: hiring, promotion, tenure, merit pay, awards. Summative evaluation of tenured faculty is performed at the discretion of the faculty member. Department heads or chairs should ensure that probationary faculty have summative peer evaluation of teaching performed in a timely manner for tenure and promotion decisions. However, use of peer review results in making a personnel decision should occur via the instructor to the maximum extent possible (e.g. through incorporation into a teaching portfolio.) The opportunity for improvement, through subsequent reviews initiated by the instructor, must be made available following negative reviews made for a personnel decision.

Peer review should involve using standardized, faculty-approved worksheets: one for review of course materials (see Chism Chapter 5) and, if included, one for review of classroom instruction (Chism Chapter 6). Prompts may be included in the worksheets to ensure that the instructor and the reviewers consider important aspects of a teaching program (Chism p. 51-52). Peer reviews for course improvement and personnel decisions should not be conducted simultaneously, but the same reviewer worksheets should be used for both types of review.

An individual conducting a review for a personnel decision should have experience in reviewing other courses, should have taught a course at the same level as the course being reviewed, and should be open to alternative teaching strategies and conceptions of student learning. Training and support for faculty reviewers can be obtained through the Biggio Center upon request.

¹Chism, N. 1999. Peer Review of Teaching: A Sourcebook. Anker Publishing, Bolton MA.

The basic steps in a peer review of teaching include:

- **Identification of peer reviewers**
For formative evaluation: The faculty member should identify two or more colleagues within and/or outside their department to act as reviewers.
For summative evaluation: In addition to one colleague selected by the faculty member, the faculty member's department head or chair should also select one faculty member to serve as a reviewer.
- **Information exchange between reviewer and faculty member**
At a minimum this should consist of an item or items that represent each of the 4 categories listed below (examples are provided of possible course materials that can be included from each category; departments may decide on additional items). Items considered optional are listed in category 5.
 1. Materials that communicate course policy and practices:
 - a. Syllabus for the course being reviewed
 - b. Course guides
 - c. Teaching evaluation instruments
 2. Materials that communicate course content:
 - a. Instructor notes from a lecture or lectures in the course
 - b. A laboratory instruction and/or activity (if applicable)
 - c. Course packets
 - d. Texts
 - e. WebCT sites
 - f. Handouts
 - g. Multimedia supplements
 3. Materials that set assignments and assess student performance:
 - a. Exams and quizzes
 - b. Project assignment directions and handouts
 - c. Classroom exercises (e.g. case studies, learning group tasks)
 4. Instructor comments on student work:
 - a. Graded papers or tests
 - b. Journals and email exchanges
 5. Optional items:
 - a. In-class and/or laboratory observation (detailed guidelines in appendix)
 - b. Video tape of classroom and/or laboratory instruction and activities
 - b. Instructor reflection on techniques, classroom research
 - c. Summary of data from prior student evaluations
- **Meetings:** As part of a peer review, meetings should be held before and after the review to discuss teaching issues of mutual interest. The meetings also allow the instructor to elaborate on teaching goals and strategies and to rebut negative comments. If the review is to be used in making a personnel decision, the comments on the reviewers' worksheets should be finalized only after these meetings.
- **Evaluation of course materials by peer review team**
The instructor provides copies of all selected course materials for review. The review is accomplished using the standardized, faculty-approved worksheets. Separate worksheets should be developed for review of course materials (see Chism Chapter 5) and, if included, observation of classroom instruction (see Chism Chapter 6).