

Department of Sociology
Teaching Observation & Evaluation Policy & Procedures
Revised February 9, 2022

I. Introduction & Rationale

To date, the Department of Sociology has conducted teaching observations and evaluations (hereafter “reviews”) on an ad hoc basis with little consistency. The department would benefit from a more systematic approach in several respects:

- For faculty, a record of teaching reviews will help improve teaching and bolster candidates’ files for purposes of promotion and tenure review, particularly when student evaluations fail to adequately represent other faculty members’ perceptions of the quality of an individual’s teaching. This disconnect can be pronounced for faculty who teach courses with subject matter that students find less appealing. Under the current approach, our candidates for promotion and tenure are disadvantaged by not having systematic reviews of their teaching to include with their files.
- For graduate students, a record of teaching reviews will have similar benefits in improving teaching and additionally will be useful for students to have when entering the job market, particularly for students seeking academic positions.
- Teaching reviews will help us identify instructors who could use assistance with their teaching and help identify specific resources and interventions that will help them improve.
- A policy will help us identify issues that consistently arise in teaching that we can address.

Beyond these benefits, we are required by both the college and campus to have a systematic policy on teaching reviews. The university’s [APT Manual](#) states:

Departments must engage in systematic and periodic peer review of teaching based on classroom visits by tenured faculty colleagues....Documentation of the candidate’s teaching record should begin during the first year of the candidate’s initial appointment and should include the outcomes of periodic peer evaluations as well as any response from the candidate to those evaluations, which could be included in the candidate’s personal statement or teaching portfolio....It is advisable to conduct these reviews annually.

In addition to their value in tenure decisions, regular reviews are intended to “provide better information for decision-making regarding promotion, tenure, five-year review, contract renewal, merit pay, and teaching recognition...”

II. Policy on Teaching Observations & Evaluations

A. Components

Teaching reviews will consider, at minimum:

- the course syllabus
- any student evaluations made available to the department by the university, and
- at least one classroom (or videoconference) observation.

Results of the observation and evaluation will be documented in a formal Review Memo, as described below.

B. Frequency & Eligibility

Instructors may request a review of their teaching at any time. At a minimum, the following reviews will occur, though the Department Chair will make any necessary adjustments to account for unusual circumstances:

- All new Assistant Professors will be reviewed during their first year, and each year thereafter. The third-year review will also include a more extensive observation and evaluation.
- Associate Professors and Full Professors will be reviewed every five years in accordance with the Sociology Guidelines for Post Tenure Review.
- Lecturers and professional track faculty with teaching as part of their job responsibilities will be reviewed annually; Senior and Principal Lecturers will be reviewed every two years.
- Graduate student instructors and Graduate Teaching Assistants will be reviewed every semester.

Faculty may be reviewed by any faculty member who would vote on their case if they were to be considered for promotion. Faculty at the highest rank (e.g., Full Professor, Principal Lecturer) may be evaluated by any faculty member at the same rank as themselves; if necessary, an evaluator from an external unit may conduct the review. Professional track faculty with teaching expertise may also conduct reviews for faculty of any rank. Graduate students may be reviewed by any faculty member.

III. Procedures

A. Review Process

Except in the case of Graduate Teaching Assistants, who will be observed and evaluated as part of the annual review of graduate students, observations and evaluations will consist of the following steps:

1. The instructor being reviewed will select a class to be observed, and provide the evaluator a copy of the course syllabus.
2. Evaluators will be provided copies of any previous teaching reviews.

Additionally, if the course has been taught previously by the instructor, the evaluator will be provided prior student evaluations of the course in order to help inform what should be observed.

3. The evaluator will produce a detailed Review Memo summarizing results of the teaching reviewed.
4. The instructor being observed will be given a copy of the Review Memo, and acknowledge having read it. Instructors will have the opportunity to provide a response to the evaluation that includes, if relevant, how any issues identified in the observation will be addressed.
5. When possible, the evaluator and the instructor will have a face-to-face meeting to discuss the results of the review.
6. When areas for improvement are identified, or if an instructor disagrees with aspects of a Review Memo, the Department Chair will work with the instructor to resolve disputes and/or identify a path forward that might include additional reviews, consultation with the Teaching and Learning Transformation Center, or other steps, as appropriate.

B. Review Timeline

Prior to the beginning of each semester, the Department Chair will notify all instructors being reviewed in the coming term. By the end of the second week of classes, the instructor will share with the Department Chair:

- The date, time, location, and subject matter of the class session to be observed;
- At the instructor's discretion, a confidential list of at least five persons who they would feel comfortable completing the review, as well as any persons who they would prefer not conduct the review.

The Department Chair will assign evaluators. This will be a collective effort, and the Department Chair will make every effort to:

- ensure that all persons eligible to complete reviews will complete roughly the same number over a reasonable period of time; and
- provide evaluators as much choice as possible in selecting instructors they will review.

Review Memos and any responses from the instructor will be completed and submitted by the final day of classes in the semester in which the teaching is reviewed.