



Peer Evaluation of Teaching (PET): A Literature Review

There are a lot of reasons why peer evaluation of teaching is necessary in institutions of higher learning. Most studies and reviews of the literature agree that the purpose for peer-review of teaching is to improve learning outcomes for students and provide professors with guidance about how to teach more effectively (Sachs and Parsell, 2014; Stewart and Valian, 2018). When done well, peer review of teaching holds the potential to help cultivate a supportive and collegial environment. Evaluations made by peers vary in nature from providing evaluative (summative) feedback, usually for the purpose of deciding things like promotions and tenure, to developmental (formative) feedback, which is focused primarily on professional development (Cohen and McKeachie, 1980; Brent and Felder, 2004). Ideally, it might involve a combination of both direct (via observations) and indirect assessment (such as, evaluation of video recordings, written materials, and student performance outcomes) (Keig, 2000).

Faculty at different stages of the tenure process will benefit from opportunities to be recognized for the good work that they do in the classroom and opportunities to improve. There are many existing models concerning how institutions might implement effective peer evaluations. Some models focus on merging both summative and formative feedback that helps faculty improve upon their teaching while feeling less judged and vulnerable in the process. In one model, for instance, the author suggests creating a semi-formal collaborative environment for peer review in which professors can meet with their reviewers in-person both before and following an assessment (Gosling, 2014). This same author argues for the importance of acknowledging faculty autonomy and providing an opportunity in the peer review process for reciprocal learning. In a discussion about faculty evaluation and tenure, Stewart and Valian (2018) advise that the peer evaluation models for faculty teaching also include clearly communicated expectations and transparency regarding evaluative criteria.

There are perhaps as many models that exist regarding how to do it well as there are examples of what could go wrong. Passing judgment, after all, is an inherent part of the process and despite its necessity and embeddedness in academic settings, there are shortcomings and potential drawbacks of the peer review process that warrant further discussion and examination. At its worst, peer evaluations of teaching may lead to faculty members feeling judged, misunderstood, or undervalued (Ackerman, Gross, and Vigneron, 2009; Brent and Felder, 2004; Stewart and Valian, 2018). Brent and Felder (2004), for instance, point to the inconsistent evaluations that might occur whenever evaluations are based on a single class observation or source of data. Another publication by Cohen and McKeachie (1980) raises the question of who is best equipped to evaluate teaching within the classroom setting and emphasizes how important it is for professors to evaluate only what they have been trained to effectively judge. Finally, and perhaps most relevant to the workshop we have designed, studies have found that interpersonal, implicit, and group biases (e.g., related to race, gender, age, nationality, and/or sexual orientation) have the potential to interfere with the peer evaluation process (Ackerman, Gross, and Vigneron, 2009; Perna, 2001; Stewart and Valian, 2018). The best models for peer review of teaching are designed to address many of these obstacles.

To learn more about bias in student evaluations of teaching, see the ACS toolkit's section on ["Revisiting Student Evaluations of Teaching \(SETs\)"](#) and its summary of ["Concerns about Student Evaluations of Teaching \(SETs\)."](#)

Works Cited

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