

Teaching Observation Guidelines and Training

Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine (VTCSOM)

Introduction

Peer observation of Teaching is intended to cultivate a culture of instructional excellence and improvement. The main purpose of the VTCSOM peer observation process is for formative evaluation of VTCSOM faculty. The feedback provided by the observer is intended for the faculty member's growth and development as an educator, rather than for public inspection or review of anyone in a supervisory role. Thus, the results are provided directly to the faculty member and are considered private and confidential.

TEACH is a great resource for this service. However, a peer teaching observation can be done by any trusted teaching colleague that is:

- A faculty member in good standing
- A TEACH member

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Overview

Definition of Peer Observation

In its most basic terms, a peer observation of teaching is when a person evaluates and assesses the instructional performance of a colleague. For the purposes of this document, the *observee* is the faculty member whose teaching practices are to be observed and evaluated. The *observer* is the person who is conducting the evaluation. The emphasis on peer observation should be on its value to the observee, the process should be observee-driven, and the results should be the property of the observee.

Purpose of Observation

Teaching observations are also a requirement for promotion for all faculty tracks at VTCSOM. Changes to Virginia Tech's 2023 bylaws resulted in the requirement that all faculty (regardless of track) who are seeking promotion to either Associate or Full Professor present evidence of at least two peer observations of their teaching **separated in duration by no less than three months**. Documentation of these observations should include:

- a. Documentation of each teaching observation based on the appropriate rubric (see **Peer Observation Rubrics and Guidance below**) which is determined by the teaching environment where the observation occurs.
- b. "At least two letters or reports from departmental or college peer" observers regarding the candidate's teaching and advising effectiveness" (Section IV. Teaching and Advising Effectiveness, J. Peer evaluations of instruction).

Observations must be at a minimum of three months apart to give the observee time to **demonstrate growth** in areas identified via a previous observation as needing improvement.

TEACH Observation Process

TEACH offers [educational observation and consultation services](#) for faculty of VTCSOM and Radford University Carilion. These experienced educators can provide objective and confidential feedback on your current teaching practices, offer educational resources for improving skills, and/or assist in measuring impact on learners.

To initiate the observation process, [Complete the TEACH Observation Request Form.](#)

Administrative Process (behind the scenes):

- a. *The form is automatically sent to TEACH Administrative Coordinator.*
- b. *Administrative Coordinator contacts preferred observer or full observer group if preferred observer is not selected. If a preferred observer is selected but not available, AC will contact the full observer group to identify a backup.*
- c. *Once the observer is identified, AC will ask observer to contact observee.*
- d. *Observer contacts AC to once observation has taken place. This triggers AC to send confirmation letter to observee.*

TEACH's 3-step Process

1. Brief pre-observation meeting (online or in person)
2. Observation takes place. Observer completes feedback rubric.
3. Post-observation Debrief using feedback rubric as a guide. Observer subsequently shares rubric and any additional notes with the observee ONLY.

It's just that easy!

What Constitutes an Observable Encounter

The answer to this question is rooted in the philosophy of teaching that VTCSOM adheres to. *We consider teaching to be encompassing of various roles and responsibilities: mentor (research or other), coach, information provider, facilitator, curriculum developer, assessor, role model, educational leader, and/or educational scholar/researcher.*

This philosophy broadens the opportunities and possibilities for observation to be inclusive of a myriad of encounters. Some examples of common teaching observation opportunities include:

In-person

- Lecture
- Large or Small group
- Operating Room
- 1-to-1 teaching opportunity
- Bedside Rounds

Hybrid formats

- A presentation for TEACH, your department, or an external audience
- May be a recorded or live event

Virtual

- Video Recording
- On-line teaching as part of course instruction
- Presenting to colleagues internally or externally

Facilitation roles

Anywhere else you are teaching! Let us know so we can add them to our list of examples!

Note: Please remember, there must be three months between receiving feedback from an observation and the time you participate in a subsequent observation. If you have questions about whether an observable encounter qualifies, please reach out to the [TEACH team](#) for questions/clarification.

Guidance for Observees

Pre-observation Meeting Guidance

Observation is:

- A confidential process
- A method of feedback for individual development
- A promotion portfolio opportunity
- An interaction with genuine, experienced educators who care about your teaching success

In preparation:

[Complete the TEACH Observation Request Form](#)

- **Please consider providing adequate time between your request for observation and the anticipated observation event.** Scheduling an observation takes time. The more notice you give, the better chance we have in identifying an observer for you.
- Choose your observer from our list of experienced observers. We recommend having someone external to your discipline provide the observation.
- TEACH staff will respond to your request.

Step 1:

Pre-observation Meeting -

- Consider where you think your strengths and growth areas are related to teaching. Be prepared to discuss this with your observer.

Step 2:

Participate in the observation -

- A skilled observer will view your teaching encounter anywhere you teach without disruption to your lecture, small or large group!
- Remember, observations can occur anywhere.

Step 3:

Participate in a post-observation debrief –

- Arrange a mutually convenient time to meet with your observer about 7-10 days post-observation to discuss your teaching strengths and growth areas.
- Clarify any additional questions about your teaching skills that you may have with your observer.
- Implement the feedback provided by your observer.
- Look for Observation Confirmation letter from the TEACH Administrator.
- Include your TEACH Observation Confirmation letter in your Elements CV and include it in your promotion dossier.

Guidance for Observers

This instrument was designed so that peer observers may provide meaningful formative feedback to educators. Best practices for peer observers of teaching involves a pre-observation meeting, the observation (for which you'll use the appropriate rubric), and a post-observation debrief with the observee.

Pre-observation Meeting Guidance (*adapted from Peer Feedback Tool for Lectures and Small Group Teaching*)¹

1. **Determine the purpose of the observation.** Ask the observee:
 - what he/she hopes to gain from this observation.
 - whether he/she is thinking of using this observation for formative purposes (promoting the development of his/her teaching practice) or summative purposes (using the outcomes of this observation for departmental or promotional review).
 - how you can best address his/her expectations and needs.

2. **Create an environment of trust/comfort.** Even though great care is taken to reassure observees that the TEACH observation process is nonpunitive, much of our experiences related to professional aspects of life are tied to the concepts of being graded, rated, and/or judged. The observer can create an environment of trust with an observee that continues reinforcing the nonpunitive nature of the observation process. Observers should operate transparently, answering questions that observees have about the process. Observers can also utilize active listening skills and appropriate probing questions to explore with the observee what their teaching skill strengths and growth areas are.

3. **Establish confidentiality.** Point out that you will keep your observations and post-session discussion confidential and that you will send the completed observation form only to the observee unless he/she requests that you disclose this information to others. Note: if the observation is used for promotional review purposes, please share with the observee that they will need to share their observation confirmation letter from TEACH with VTCSOM Faculty Affairs in the promotion packet.

4. **Verify the observation appointment and location are clear and correct. Schedule the post-observation feedback session.** Ensure all parties are clear on the date, time, and location of the observation and schedule the post-observation feedback session within 7-10 days on a day and time that are mutually agreed upon.

5. **Learn about the context of the teaching venue to be observed.** Ask for information about the observation context as applicable:
 - the learner audience
 - the session plan
 - the session format
 - the session goals
 - any other information the observee wants you to learn about before you observe

6. Identify teaching behaviors to be observed with the observee by:

- asking what he/she would like you to focus on during the observation
- sharing the observation rubric form
- asking the observee to identify any specific teaching behaviors on the form that he/she would like you to pay particular attention to during the observation

7. Decide on the observer's position and introduction. Before the session begins, decide with your peer where you should sit and how you will be introduced to the learners in order to share with them the focus of your observation.

Observation Guidance

1. Before the observation, **select the rubric** that best fits the teaching context (bedside, surgical, lecture-style, etc.).

2. **Maintain the focus of the observation.** Focus on the teaching behaviors the observee exhibits and be attentive to other aspects you might want to consider drawing their attention to as well.

3. **Document observations.** During the observation, you can take field notes to record your observations and/or relevant quotes and then use those notes to guide your completion of the form after the observation. You may also complete the form during the observation itself. Choose the approach that would best work for you. It is recommended by Virginia Tech that observation feedback be robust and contain both rubric documentation and narrative comments.

4. **Identify aspects that you think are strengths of your peer's teaching practice.**

5. **Identify aspects that you think he/she needs to develop.**

6. Post-observation, **share complete written feedback** with the observee at the post-observation meeting.

Post-observation Debrief Guidance

The post-observation debrief provides a safe, supportive environment for the observee to receive feedback on their teaching. It is the responsibility of the observer to provide the observee with comprehensive feedback that can be implemented in subsequent teaching endeavors by the observee. Observers should provide written feedback, talk through the feedback with the observee, and query for questions the feedback might solicit.

The post-observation debrief should occur 7-10 days after the observation has occurred. Observee and observer should meet in a mutually agreed upon location that provides confidentiality and at a time that is mutually agreed upon.

Note on Providing Feedback: The feedback provided should be rich enough in detail so that observees can obtain clear insight into the nature of their teaching strengths and weaknesses. Peer observations are intended to complement teaching feedback obtained via other sources such as learner evaluations.

Peer Observation Rubrics and Guidance

Multi-purpose Observation Rubrics

[Teaching Observation Form](#)

[Interprofessional Teaching Observation Form](#)

Didactics/Lecture

[Academy at Harvard Medical School's Peer Observation of Case-Based Collaborative Learning Worksheet and Compendium](#)

[Lecture Observation Form](#)

[Small Group Observation Form](#)

Clinical Encounter

[Peer Feedback for Clinical Teaching](#)

- [Guidance for utilizing Peer Feedback for Clinical Teaching Rubric](#)

[Ambulatory Outpatient](#)

[Inpatient Teaching Observation](#)

[Bedside Teaching](#)

[Operating Room Teaching](#)

Note: Not all settings will have a specific rubric. As an observer, you can select the most appropriate one based on your pre-observation consultation.

FAQs

Q1: Do I have to go through TEACH for my peer observation?

A1: No, peer observations do not have to be completed through TEACH. While the TEACH Observation service is open to all who teach, departments are encouraged to also establish their own peer observation process.

Q2: Can I have a student or resident serve as my peer observer?

A2: No. Peer observations must be completed by faculty-level observers who are active TEACH members.

Q3: Which types of teaching scenarios qualify for peer observation?

A3: Any experience through which a faculty member is providing guidance to at least one learner for the purpose of their development as a healthcare professional, teacher, and/or researcher would qualify as a peer observation opportunity.

Q4: What are some examples of peer observation venues?

A4: Lectures, Large or small groups, Operating room, 1-to-1 teaching opportunities, Bedside rounds, Recorded lectures, or sessions such as Grand Rounds. The possibilities are endless. Reach out to [TEACH](#) if you would like to discuss a particular teaching venue.

Q5: Who should I ask to observe my teaching?

A5: We recommend someone outside of your discipline provide your observation. Also, the observer should be a VTCSOM or RUC faculty member in good standing and be an active TEACH member.

Resources

[Twelve Tips for Peer Observation of Teaching](#)

[Key Tips for Teaching in the Clinical Setting](#)

[Observation Infographic](#)

[Virginia Tech Faculty Handbook – Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine](#)

References

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