



January 2009

Dear Peer Teaching Network Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the pilot version of the Skylight Peer Teaching Network. The goal of this project is to support the development of instructional skills and promote collegial, cross-disciplinary networking. While some teaching review programs already exist on campus, these are often formal, hierarchical summative evaluations, closely linked to promotion and tenure. Not surprisingly, participants can find this kind of review stressful and time-consuming.

We envision a different approach, with somewhat different objectives. By pairing instructors in the Faculty of Science for reciprocal classroom visits and feedback, we hope you can benefit from the following:

- To participate in an **informal system** – little paperwork, no reporting, less time
- To tap into **collegial support** – your partner will be an equivalent peer
- To gather **formative feedback** – based on a snapshot of your teaching
- To **grow & develop** as an instructor – the focus is not to review or evaluate someone
- To participate in a **cross-disciplinary network** – see how other scientists are teaching science at UBC! Learn something new!

The peer teaching network process consists of the following steps:

- 1) Initial meeting (face-to-face)**
- 2) Classroom visit (reciprocal)**
- 3) Debrief meeting**

Attached to this letter are documents that will guide you through each step of the process. We have put together a list of questions you may want to discuss and reflect on during each step. There is also a section on how to give constructive feedback on teaching. Please feel free to use these documents at your discretion.

For the purpose of this pilot process, I would like to interview you individually (20-30min) at the end of this process to hear what challenges you had and what you got out of it. We want to refine this process, so your feedback will be helpful. Thanks for participating and let me know when you have completed the debrief meeting with your partner.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions.

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## I. Questions to ask before attending your colleague's class

*These questions are designed to guide your conversation before you attend each other's classes.*

- What do I (the observer) need to know about the course and/or class I will attend? (e.g. mandatory course? recent changes? common challenges? failure rate? success stories?)
  
- What is your plan for the class session? What will you be doing? What will your students be doing?
  
- What strategies will you employ to engage your students throughout the session? Why have you chosen these strategies?
  
- How would you like me (the observer) to participate in class? (Silently? Actively?)
  
- Are there particular aspects of your teaching that you want feedback on?



## II. Questions to think about in class

*These questions are designed to guide your observations while you are attending your colleague's class. We recommend taking notes and taking a few moments after class to complete and expand upon your notes.*

- What worked well in this class? Did anything surprise you? Did you get any new ideas for your own teaching?
  
- Did your colleague clearly communicate key concepts? How?
  
- Did anything confuse you? What might have reduced your confusion?
  
- How did students behave during this class? What behaviours did you observe? Were the students engaged throughout the class? How could you tell?



- Do you have any ideas to share with your colleague about strategies to increase student engagement? Have you tried or experienced teaching strategies or classroom activities that might be useful?
  
- Did your colleague follow the plan for the class? If not, what changed, and why? Was the change a help or a hindrance?
  
- Anything else you noticed? Any thoughts or suggestions you plan to share with your colleague?



### III. Questions to guide your debrief meeting

*These questions are designed to guide your debrief meeting with your colleague. We recommend taking a few moments after your class to take notes that will remind you how the class went.*

- How do you (the instructor) think/feel the class went? Why?
- If you were to teach this class over again, would you do anything differently? If yes, what would you change? Why? If not, why not?
- How do you feel that your choice of teaching strategies contributed to your students' learning during this session? How can you tell? Give examples.
- Did you accomplish any other goals you had for the session? Why or why not?
- If you were working on a particular aspect of your teaching, how did that go? Please give an example.
- What will you be working on next to further improve your teaching? How will you begin?



## Guide for Giving Constructive Feedback

- **Be specific and selective**  
Feedback overload reduces the possibility that the receiver may be able to use what he/she receives effectively. Avoid vague and broad statements.
- **Focus on the behaviour that can be changed rather than personal traits or shortcomings a person has no control over**  
e.g. we might say "you seem to rush through the lecture without providing time for questions from students" rather than "you're insensitive to students' needs." The former allows for the possibility of change; the latter implies a fixed trait.
- **Share information first, give advice second**  
Sharing information leaves a person free to decide for himself or herself, in accordance with his/her own goals and needs. Giving advice often comes across as telling the person what to do and may take away the person's freedom to decide.
- **Avoid assumptions of motives**  
Telling a person what his/her motivations or intentions are tends to alienate the person and contributes to a climate of resentment, suspicion, and distrust; it does not contribute to learning or development. It is dangerous to assume that we know why a person says or does something. If we are uncertain of the motives or intent behind a behaviour, this uncertainty itself is feedback and should be revealed.
- **Avoid "need to," "always," and "never" phrases.**  
Such phrases send implied messages that are usually not an accurate reflection of reality. Frame feedback in terms of what actually occurred and work at finding solutions collaboratively.
- **Give the feedback person-to-person, not through messengers or technology.**  
Constructive feedback is verbal and informal. It is best done by talking to the person, either face-to-face or by phone when you physically can't be together.

Adapted from:

- Lynn Parish, "Client Interviewing and Counselling," Faculty of Law, University of Alberta.  
<http://www.law.ualberta.ca/Current-Students/Resources/Course-Notes/Lynn-Parish/feedback.php>



- *“Scaffold #D10: Giving Constructive Feedback,” Centre for Teaching and Learning, Georgian College, Barrie, Ontario.*

## **Suggested words and phrases to use when giving feedback...**

### Reinforcing:

- I really enjoyed your teaching because...
- You seem to enjoy...
- It's very obvious that you...
  - put a lot of effort into this
  - thought a lot about this
- I really like what you've done here (& give an example)...

### Clarifications & Suggestions:

- I had a hard time with this aspect of the class/activity... because... I would have appreciated it if...
- I wonder whether...
- I'm confused...
- I'm curious about how you... came to this conclusion...
- At the end of your class, what I was wondering most was...
- What would have happened had you...
- Have you considered...
- As an alternative...
- I'm not sure I agree...

*Give specific comments on “how to improve.”*