Peer Evaluation for online and blended courses (Ver 1)

A peer evaluation for an online or hybrid course is different process than for an on campus course. It cares about the same underlying questions but, in assessing the teaching and learning experience, the evaluator needs to explicitly consider the modality of the course and wider learning environment. Whether a live Zoom meeting, a pre-recorded lecture, or a discussion board, understanding and assessing part of a course requires examining its context and supporting structures (for example, in assessing a recorded lecture, the student interaction will take place around the recording but not in the video).

This guidance will present advice for both synchronous and asynchronous courses and will offer a mixture of specific yes/no questions and overarching things to reflect on. The intent is to support reviewers as they prepare for and write a peer evaluation letter by providing an overall framework for reflection.

There are more robust course review tools available for online and blended learning but we’ve tried to create a short version that’s parallel to existing guidelines. For further information about other guidelines, please contact ETM.

And remember, this is a collaborative process for the benefit of your colleague and their students. Not all of these will be relevant for your letter.

# Preparation

Ask for (temporary) access to the course Canvas site and syllabus to familiarize yourself with the course objectives, pedagogies, and the specific expectations of the piece of the course you will be evaluating. Schedule a short meeting with your peer to discuss the course objectives, agree on the scope of the evaluation (a module, week, day, topic, whole course) be evaluated and what they expect to accomplish during that period.

Irrespective of what piece of the course you are evaluating, the basics of the course set up (in Canvas site or elsewhere) should help frame your observation. Is it clear to students that they are welcome, what they need to know and do first, how to get help, and where to start? In online, blended, and hybrid, the course site underpins and reinforces and synchronous experience.

Course set up questions:

* Is it clear how to start and proceed through the course site? Is the design student-centered/ stand-alone (using topical or weekly organization) or a file store (files, assignments, lists of links)? Both options work in different situations, but the more online the course is the more it should work on its own without live explanation.
* Is the technology to be used in the course explained? If there is anything extra (beyond Canvas and Zoom), can students practice?
* If the course is doing anything that requires a syllabus statement, (e.g. recording or proctoring), is that present?
* If there are synchronous meetings, is it clear how to access the meetings?
* If there are recordings, is it clear how to access the videos?
* Is there clear information about how to get help? Office hours? Instructor contact information?

# Pedagogy

In exploring the course site and engaging with the specific piece of your colleague’s teaching that you are observing, consider their pedagogical choices. Think about:

* How are the three key types of interaction in any course – student to student, student to content, and student to instructor -- present?
* How does the course take advantage of the modality/-ies it uses?
  1. If it is synchronous, is it interactive? How does the course site help students prepare for, or reflect on the synchronous element?
  2. If it is asynchronous, does it offer students flexibility on when they study and offer everyone a voice?
* How is student voice and agency present?
* What spaces are there for community?
* Are there clear instructions in the course site about assignments or discussions (prompts, guidelines, rubrics, or other information)?
  1. Do they clearly explain directions for completing the task (purpose, expectations [length, citations, etc.], how to submit the assignment)?
* Is there clear information about feedback and grading? Is there any indication about when feedback is received and how the feedback will help the student improve?

# The classroom (the agreed “scope” you are evaluating)

In a focused way consider how the student knows about, arrives at, participates in, and reflects on the ‘classroom’ experience you are evaluating.

* How does the experience begin?
  1. If this is a live activity
     1. How do students know how to get to the meeting?
     2. What do they know in advance about the meeting?
     3. Do they have clear guidelines on participating?
     4. How does the instructor welcome students and encourage focus/ engagement?
  2. If this is a flexible course activity
     1. How do students know what they have to do?
     2. How does the instructor frame the activity?
     3. If the activity is a video or online activity outside of the course site, do students know what they are clicking into? (meaningful link title/ title slide/ text intro)
     4. How do students engage with and use or discuss the activity?
* How is the experience connected to previous and future course elements?
* How are issues of punctuality, time management, and pace addressed or manifested? For example, do live meetings start and finish on time? Or is there an indication of how long a recording is or an activity is expected to take?
* How does the instructor integrate faith into their teaching? And how do they encourage openness to other perspectives?
* How is student voice, agency, or interaction present in this specific experience?
* Is the experience accessible? clear audio; captions; transcript; use of headings/ document structure; explanatory links

# Student interactions

The context for these interactions will be embedded in the other parts of these guidelines but this is a more focused point to reflect on the instructor-student dynamic that you observe.

* How does the instructor demonstrate care and instantiate sensitivity to trauma?
* How does the instructor communicate a safe, welcoming environment for student discussion and collaboration?
* How does the instructor communicate a safe, welcoming environment for spiritual formation?
* How does the instructor explicitly check for understanding or get feedback?
* Do all students have a space to ask questions or reflect?
* What was the students’ affect? Did they seem engaged or bored? How did the instructor manage this responsively?