Jackson College
Resource Guide for Reciprocal Classroom Observations

Classroom observations are great opportunities to connect with a faculty colleague, share professional development goals, and gain new insights and ideas about enhancing instructional practices. Observations are intended to be formative and constructive, not evaluative or critical. With the right preparation and approach, both observers and those being observed can gain a great deal from reciprocal observations. The end result can be valuable and actionable professional growth for both faculty members.

This guide is designed to assist faculty so they can get the most out of their reciprocal classroom observations. It provides suggestions for what to do before, during, and after observations.

Pre-Observation
• **Connect:** Before a classroom observation, it is recommended that the person observing and the person being observed find some time to meet in person (preferred) or connect over the phone or email about their professional development goals and what they want to get out of the reciprocal observation experience.
• **Discuss:** The person being observed should share with the person observing the following types of information:
  o **The community of learners:** What are the students like? What has been enjoyable about working with them, and what have been the challenges? Provide details and examples.
  o **Student learning goals:** What are the student learning objectives for this specific class? What do you hope to achieve?
  o **Faculty goals:** What are your current professional development goals? Anything with regard to your instruction that you’re trying to work on, experiment with, strengthen, etc.?
  o **Area(s) of focus during observation:** What aspect(s) of your teaching would you like the observer to focus on especially? Examples include:
    ▪ Classroom management
    ▪ Student engagement effectiveness
    ▪ Differentiation of instructional strategies
    ▪ Incorporation of active learning
    ▪ Effective use of technology
    ▪ Lesson clarity and organization
    ▪ Student assessment, feedback, and encouragement
    ▪ Creating an inclusive, equitable, and student-centered learning environment
    ▪ And much more, as it relates to your faculty goals...
  o The person observing should also share his/her professional development goals. Any overlap or relevance between faculty members’ goals should be identified and discussed.
• **Plan:** Also discuss how the faculty member being observed will introduce the observer to students and how long the observer can stay. If the observer cannot stay the full time, determine when a good time would be to conclude the observation and have the observer leave as to minimize class disruption.

During the Observation
• **Focus:** The person observing should focus on what was discussed during the pre-observation meeting. View yourself as an extra set of eyes for your colleague. Remember that you are observing
the class and your colleague, not evaluating them. Remember to focus less on the “what” (the content being delivered) and more on the “how” (the act of teaching).

- **Take notes**: Take running notes of what you see and experience. Highlight anything that particularly strikes you about the class and instruction that you think would be good to connect with your colleague about afterward.

- **Be specific**: If your colleague asked for feedback or recommendations, focus on identifying concrete suggestions rather than providing broad generalizations.

**Post-Observation**

- **Reflect**: As soon as possible after observing a class, the instructors should meet to reflect. This meeting will be most effective if both participants focus on what happened in the class and ask questions that allow both to consider different ways of teaching.
  
  - Start with a general question like, “What do you think went well in the class?” or “What particularly struck you about the class?” and discuss as colleagues. Avoid generalities; the more specific, the better.
  
  - Consider common teaching challenges and how you address those challenges differently. It might be useful to spend some time brainstorming additional options and ideas.

- **Debrief and discuss**: Other questions to guide discussion include the following:
  
  - How well did you meet the goals you set for this class?
  - What did you do that helped your students learn ABC concept or skill?
  - How did you clarify ideas for students?
  - What were some ways you checked in with students to make sure they were learning what you set out for them to learn?
  - What would you change if you could teach that class again? Why?

**For the Adjunct Faculty Certification Process: How to Report Completed Classroom Observations**

- After you get a chance to debrief with your colleague, please email Kate Thirolf, Director of Instructional Innovation, at JCAdjunctSupport@jccmi.edu the following info:
  
  - The name of the faculty member who observed you or whom you observed
  - The course name
  - The date of the observation
  - Share 2-3 takeaways that you gained from the observation and what you might do differently in terms of your instruction as a result.

**Acknowledgements**

This document benefited tremendously from discussions with several faculty, including and especially Suzanne Kiess, Kristine Pursell, Clarinda Flannery, Danielle Lawson, and Nabiha Zakir. Some details included above were directly sourced from the “Faculty-to-Faculty Post-Observation Discussion” and “Recommendations for Reciprocal Classroom Observations” documents prepared by Clarinda Flannery and Kristine Pursell.

Last modified: *March 22, 2017*