Peer Review of Teaching and Instructional Support Process

Context for the Peer Review of Teaching and Instructional Support Process

Peer Review of Teaching and Instructional Support Working Group

This working group was established at the October meeting of the Teaching and Learning Committee of Senate (TLC). The working group was tasked with invigorating and expanding Thompson Rivers University's (TRU's) peer review procedures. From Fall 2018 until Fall 2020, the group investigated current peer review practices at TRU and other institutions, conducted an extensive literature review, developed a process to pilot with various faculty members and departments at TRU, revised and added tools and tweaked the process in response to the pilot project feedback, and introduced the new process to Faculty Councils.

The ideal is for departments to select, adapt, or develop their own tools and standards and use or adapt the process in a way that works for their contexts. The pilot was the first step towards this goal. We also hope introducing this process will move TRU towards a more formative culture of peer review and away from the notion of peer review as a formality. We also wanted to promote the concept of peer review as a valued tool in continual improvement and scholarly teaching/professional practice.

Working Group's Guiding Principles

The working group developed these principles for our work regarding peer review after extensive literature review, discussion, and investigation into practices at TRU and other post-secondary institutions:

Peer review of teaching and instructional support should

- build a culture of continual improvement;
- be department-led, instructor-driven;
- foster mutual respect between (and ideally instill trust and confidence in) reviewer and reviewee;
- be flexible (accommodating all types of delivery and faculty roles);
- incorporate evidence-based progress and recognition for departments;
- not be labour intensive, but still be rigorous.

(Adapted from Chism, 2007; Bandy, n.d.; Hyland et al., 2018; Brent & Felder, 2004; Cavanagh et al., 1996; Keig, 2000; Aman, 2009; Golparian et al., 2014)

Along with these guiding principles, we want to acknowledge that peer review is complex, and the literature and practices reflect that complexity by offering sometimes contradictory perspectives about what practices work best. However, the literature is consistent in acknowledging that in order to be done well, peer review requires substantial focus and time commitment.

Background to Peer Review/Observation at TRU

Currently peer review plays a role in promotion and tenure, as applications require a minimum of three classroom observations completed by colleagues from the last 40 months (please see Article 6, Appendix 1, item c.iv of the TRUFA Collective Agreement, which outlines that for the purposes of the tenure and/or promotion dossier, “A minimum of three sets of course evaluations and three sets of peer observation data across a range of assigned courses as per Article 10, if applicable, within the 40 month period preceding the application” must be included). Peer review also plays a role in performance review for tenure-track, limited term, and sessional faculty (please see Article 7.3.7.2, item iii of the TRUFA Collective Agreement, which lists “Classroom visitation and assessment by colleague, one (1) per each year of contract under review” as part of performance review). Under the current practices, peer review for promotion and tenure at TRU is formative, as reviews are the property of the reviewee and (at least initially) are for their improvement and information. However, these reviews become summative when the reviewee puts them forward for promotion and tenure application or they are included in as evidence for a performance review. While sessional and limited-term contract faculty members undergo a similar procedure for performance reviews, due to the short time span, their reviews are summative in nature, although the same tools are generally used.

Proposed Process

Peer review is most effective when it is used as an iterative and reflective process to improve teaching/professional practice. Drawing on processes taking place at TRU, evidence-based practices outlined in the literature, and processes at other institutions, we have outlined a process that is flexible and scalable and allows reviewees, Chairs, Departments, and reviewers to make choices that will fit their own specific contexts. While not every step is essential for every review, we encourage Departments to create their own guidelines based on the process outlined below and in the attached table.

Peer Review Process Steps

In brief, the steps are as follows:

1. Peer review support is offered for and resources are selected by faculty
2. Review is initiated
3. Reviewee and reviewer(s) are matched
4. Pre-review meeting(s) happen(s)
5. Review occurs
6. Post-review meeting(s) happen(s)
7. Reviewer composes and submits the report
8. Reviewee reflects on report and creates and implements an action plan

These steps are outlined in detail below. Some of the information included has been borrowed or adapted from Chism, 2007; Hyland et al., 2018; Brent & Felder, 2004;

Cavanagh et al., 1996; Keig, 2000; Aman, 2009; Golparian et al., 2014; University of Saint Katherine, n.d.; TRUFA Collective Agreement.

1. **Peer review support is offered for and resources are selected by faculty**
   - Faculty interested in participating in peer review will be offered support and resources (including opportunities to participate in virtual or face-to-face workshops) that are grounded in evidence-based practices, which will foster a peer-review process that is useful and centred on fostering improvement
   - PRC members, TRUFA representatives, and others involved in processes that require peer review are especially encouraged to take advantage of support and review resources.
   - Outcomes for the training are as follows are outlined later in this document.

   Considerations for Faculty, Chairs, and Departments:
   - Who will undertake training?
   - Will both reviewers and reviewees participate?
   - Will faculty participation in training be tracked and rewarded? If so, how? (A suggested tracking method is provided on pages 10-11 of this document.)

2. **Review is initiated**
   - Peer review regularly happens at TRU as part of the Tenure and Promotion application processes as outlined in the TRUFA Collective Agreement (CA). Please see **Article 6, Appendix 1, item c.iv**, which outlines that for the purposes of the tenure and/or promotion dossier, "A minimum of three sets of course evaluations and three sets of peer observation data across a range of assigned courses as per Article 10, if applicable, within the 40 month period preceding the application" should be included in the teaching dossier for any tenure and/or promotion application.
   - Peer review also happens at TRU as part of the Performance processes as outlined in the TRUFA Collective Agreement (CA). Summative peer review is mentioned in **Article 7.3.7.2**, which states:

     > The summative performance review for each Faculty Member shall be based on:
     >
     > (a) The relevant exhibits and items listed in the Faculty Member's Annual Professional Activity Report per Article 7.2; and
     >
     > (b) Teaching Responsibilities
     >
     > (i) A teaching dossier as outlined in Article 6 – Appendix 1. Student course evaluations may be used as evidence of students' classroom experience and for the purposes of the Faculty Member demonstrating reflective scholarly practice, but they may not be used as evidence of teaching effectiveness.
     >
     > (ii) For the Faculty Members who do not have at minimum 3 course evaluations as per Article 6 – Appendix 1 (c)(iv), they will be

required to submit an analysis of all course evaluations for the period under review; and

(iii) Classroom visitation and assessment by colleague, one (1) per each year of contract under review;

- However, until/unless they are included in a Performance Review or tenure and/or promotion application, peer reviews are mainly formative in nature, as any reporting to the reviewee is confidential, and the report belongs to the reviewee. If the report goes to the Chair, it should remain confidential. The reviewee may then choose to submit any given review as part of their tenure and/or promotion package, at which point the formative review becomes one part of a summative package. Also, for **formative purposes**, faculty are not limited in the number of peer reviews in which they participate. As peer review provides opportunities for reflecting on and improving teaching and professional practice, it should be encouraged as part of regular practice for all faculty. **Therefore, it is best to assume that all reports may be both formative and summative.**
- Ultimately, whether peer review is formative or summative depends on the purpose of the report and who will have access to the reviewer's report.
- In the case of Departments that differentiate between review processes that happen for formative purposes and those that happen for summative purposes, that differentiation should be transparent and clearly outlined, and overlaps between the formative and summative should be articulated.
- Ideally, faculty members should have autonomy over their review processes.

Considerations for Faculty, Chairs, and Departments:

- Who will be reviewed? (Some reviews are required by the CA; please see the first bullet point under point 2, above, for details.)
- For what purpose will reviews happen (performance review, tenure, promotion, personal development)? (Sometimes this is decided by the CA; please see the first bullet point under point 2, above, for details.)
- Who decides when reviews are helpful?
- What is the purpose of and goal for the review?
- Will the review be formative or summative? How will these kinds of reviews be differentiated?
- How will the report be used?
- Will faculty participation in reviews be tracked and rewarded? If so, how? (A suggested tracking method is provided on page 10 of this document; a template is available.)

3. Reviewee and reviewer(s) are matched

- How this happens will depend on the department. Departments have the freedom to decide how best to match reviewers and reviewees, so they may want to set guidelines for this process. Ideally, this will be influenced by the purpose of the review. For some reviews, it might be important to have subject matter experts, but for others, it may be essential to have teaching experts—or both.

- Departments may decide to ensure that, over the course of a faculty member's pre-tenure career, they have a variety of reviewers to draw from and that a variety of courses are reviewed.
- Different departments may have different guidelines for matching reviewers and reviewees.

Considerations for Faculty, Chairs, and Departments:

- How many reviews will the reviewee require?
- How many reviewers?
- What kind of training or support might be ideal before someone can be a reviewer?
- Should the reviewer(s) be subject-matter experts, exceptional teachers, or both? (This will likely depend on the goals for the review; for example, a subject matter expert would be helpful if the reviewee were seeking feedback on subject-matter competence, and an exceptional teacher would be helpful if the reviewee were seeking feedback on pedagogical strategies.)
- From which department(s) will reviewer(s) be selected?
- How many classes (or workshops or sessions) should reviewer(s) observe?
- Will serving as a peer reviewer be included in faculty APARs?
- Will faculty serving as reviewers be rewarded for this service? If so, how?

4. Pre-review meeting(s) happen(s)

- Reviewee and reviewer(s) meet to determine the purpose(s) and scope of and goal(s) for the review, all of which should be in alignment. The reviewee should provide to the reviewer the appropriate documents in advance of the observation, if applicable.
- The conversation may include the following:
    - The purpose, scope, and goal(s) of the review
    - Determination of which class(es) or professional activities will be observed, including date(s) and time(s)
    - A description of the context for the class being observed, including any relevant background information the reviewer(s) might need OR a description of the professional role, including any relevant background the reviewer(s) might need
    - Discussion of which teaching or professional role materials would be important for the reviewer(s) to examine (for example, the course syllabus, assignments, Moodle modules, rubrics, handouts, slides, survey data, chat transcripts, e-mail data, or any other materials related to the goals of the review); materials should be collected at this meeting

- Consideration of any specific areas on which the reviewee would like the reviewer(s) to focus their feedback

Considerations for Faculty, Chairs, and Departments:

- What are the goals for this review?
- What is the reviewee hoping to learn about their teaching or instructional support role?
- What, specifically, will be included in review? Will reviewers observe face-to-face, synchronous, or asynchronous class(es), workshop(s), or other professional activities? If so, what forms will be used?
- Will the reviewers also review documents? If so, which documents will the reviewer(s) need to see in advance? After?
- Departments are encouraged to create their own guidelines about what should be included in peer reviews of teaching or instructional support.

5. **Review occurs**

- The review takes place at the previously agreed-upon date, time, and place.
- The reviewer evaluates the relevant materials and conducts an observation using a structured observation form (see Brent & Felder, 2004), prioritizing the goals outlined by the instructor (York Teaching Commons provides observation forms for reviewee reflection).

For teaching faculty:

- Reviewer(s) observe(s) class(es) and review(s) appropriate materials.
- For classroom observation, reviewer(s) should be as unobtrusive as possible and stay for the entire class when possible (Chism, 2007)
- This might include review of the course syllabus, assignments, Moodle modules, rubrics, handouts, or anything else related to the goals of the review.
- Reviewee might complete a self-appraisal for the course being observed.

For instructional support faculty:

- Reviewer(s) undertake(s) review, which may include an observation of a workshop or other professional activity as well as appropriate documentation.
- For direct observation, reviewer(s) should be as unobtrusive as possible and stay for the entire activity when possible.
- The review might include workshop materials, survey data, chat transcripts, e-mail data, or any other materials related to the goals of the review.
- Reviewee might complete a self-appraisal for the activity being observed.

Considerations for Faculty, Chairs, and Departments:

- What will the review look like?

- Will reviewer(s) observe class(es), workshop(s), or other professional activities? If so, what forms will be used?
- Will the reviewers also review documents, online materials, or other components of the course or activity? If so, which ones?
- Will departments use rubrics to assist with the review of materials and documents?

6. Post-review meeting(s) happen(s)

- Reviewee and Reviewer(s) meet to debrief and for the reviewee to receive feedback. The reviewee should have an opportunity to respond to the feedback, and this conversation should inform the reviewer report that follows. Golparian et al. (2015) provide suggestions for this discussion.
- Ideally, a brief meeting should happen directly after the observation/review, and a longer discussion should happen once reviewee and reviewer have had an opportunity to reflect on the class/workshop/activity and the reviewer has had time to review the materials in light of the observation and the goals of the reviewee.

Considerations for Faculty, Chairs, and Departments:

- When is an optimal time to meet?
- How much time should be allowed for processing/reflection in between the observation and the meeting?
- When is the report needed?

7. Reviewer composes and submits the report to the reviewee

- Ideally, reviewer(s) and reviewee discuss in advance to ensure the report includes consideration of all relevant instructional materials/classroom observation(s), student outcomes, and input/comments from the instructor.
- The report may include strengths, reflection, areas for improvement, and it should support and promote innovative teaching or professional practice.
- The report may consider the curriculum, learning outcomes, commitment to professional excellence, and specific supports useful for the professional role.
- For the peer review report to be valid, it must include the following:
  - The name of the reviewee,
  - The course title, number, and section (if applicable),
  - The name of the reviewer,
  - The date of the observation, and
  - The signature of the reviewer.

Considerations for Faculty, Chairs, and Departments:

- What format will the report take?
- If a form is used, which one will best fit the purpose of the review?

    - Forms and templates are available for departments to use or adapt
- Will Departments adapt or create their own forms?
- Is there an optimal or ideal length for the report?
- Will the report be included in the reviewee's dossier or APAR?

8. Reviewee reflects on report and creates and implements an action plan

- The reviewee will ideally benefit from helpful suggestion(s) for improvement(s) and opportunities to learn how to teach effectively, to practice new teaching/professional role techniques, and to receive coaching from colleagues.
- Ideally, the reviewee documents a brief reflection and action plan (templates are provided) and implements it in future course planning and delivery or appropriate professional practice.

Considerations for Faculty, Chairs, and Departments:

- How will the reflection be used to improve teaching or professional practice?
- Will the reflection be included in the reviewee's APAR?
- What role will the reflection/action plan play in the reviewee's performance review or dossier?

Peer Review Support and Resources

We have collected, developed, and adapted forms, frameworks, and rubrics from various departments at TRU, from other institutions, and from the literature. We have provided a variety of options and invite faculty and Departments to select, adapt, or develop tools that are appropriate for their own contexts. Please see the attached forms and templates in Appendix A on page 12.

We developed a peer review workshop for those participating in the pilot project, and we have revised it based on feedback from the pilot. We're planning to offer the workshop, virtually or face-to-face (when possible), to all interested faculty members. The workshop is designed to support them in their roles as reviewers or reviewees of peer review of teaching and instructional support.

Workshop Learning Outcomes

By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to

- Identify evidence-based practices for effective peer review of teaching and instructional support
- Outline a clear process for the different types of peer review of teaching and instructional support
- Articulate the features of effective peer feedback
- Communicate descriptive, specific, and forward-focused feedback to peers
- Articulate considerations for selecting peer reviewer(s)

- Educate their Department on the documentation/recognition process

Workshop Components

Materials have been compiled from the working group's literature review and are designed to offer options to reviewees and reviewers. Components included in the workshop are as follows:

- Reviewing steps involved in and considerations for the peer review process
- Determining the purpose of and setting goals for the review
- Matching reviewees to reviewers
- Selecting peer review observation forms
- Conducting pre- and post-review meetings
- Conducting the review itself, including tips for classroom, virtual synchronous session, virtual asynchronous recording, workshop, and professional activity observation, reviewing course materials and other documentation
- Providing effective peer feedback
- Composing the report (for reviewers, expectations; for reviewees, how to use the report as part of a larger professional development plan)

Workshops will be offered in the form of an approximately 90-120 minute session through the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) or virtually through Moodle. In the Moodle site, there are also videos to offer faculty peer review practice opportunities. Please contact Carolyn Ives at cives@tru.ca for more information.

Department Recognition and Celebration

At this time, as mentioned above, peer review at TRU is closely linked to Performance Review and Tenure and Promotion applications. However, a peer review of teaching/instructional support process should also foster a culture of continual improvement, instill trust, and provide evidence-based progress and recognition for departments. Finally, the process should ultimately energize—but not overburden—departments, Chairs, or faculty, and it should be instructor-driven and belong to the departments.

To this end, a suggested starting point is for departments to document peer reviews undertaken by members. This should follow a plan→do→review process through which departments identify faculty who wish to have a peer review completed and those who are willing to do them. The manner in which this occurs is up to the department (at a meeting, or through private communication with chair, etc.), but generally at the start of any term, the chair (or designate) would note who is being reviewed and in which course, who will conduct the review, and what sort of review each reviewee will have. The plan will then be reviewed at the end of each term, and the Chair will note whether or not reviews were completed.

Peer Review of Teaching and Instructional Support Process

The following form is a one proposed template to document this process, but departments are welcome to create their own tracking system.

Department:______________________________

Reviewee	Reviewer	Course/ Professional activity (for instructional support faculty)	Date of Pre-observation Meeting	Type of Review	Date Completed	Date of Post-observation Meeting

The review should not necessarily be limited to classroom observation, but could include other components, such as course materials, assignments, problem sets, quizzes, online materials, Moodle modules, or other relevant materials. Details should be included as to whether multiple classroom observations were completed.

In addition to the above, departments should keep track of members who have undergone training for peer review. This would consist of a similar table, simply noting current members of the department and who and when they completed the training. This would facilitate faculty knowing their options for reviewers.

Member	Training Completed (y/n)	Year

Documentation Review and Department Recognition
These two tables of information may be submitted to CELT as part of a recognition program. CELT will recognize and celebrate progress by departments in peer review and provide Departments with certificates as they achieve certain milestones in terms of numbers of reviews completed.

Terminology

Colleague: Another term for peer as used in the TRUFA Collective Agreement
Peer Review of Teaching and Instructional Support: Informed colleague feedback and assessment about faculty teaching for either fostering improvement (formative) or making personnel decisions (summative). (Adapted from Chism, 2007, p.3)

Peer review normally includes a review of classroom/workshop/professional activities through direct observation and a review of course or instructional materials
Reviewee: The faculty member being reviewed.
Reviewer: The person selected to review. Ideally, this person will have had training. The reviewer should be selected on the basis of the goals of the review.

Working Group Members

Thank you to the past and current members of the Peer Review of Teaching and Instructional Support Working Group: Mark Paetkau, Lian Dumouchel, Cindy James, Elizabeth Templeman, Elizabeth Rennie, Denise Weisgerber, Avninder Gill, Carolyn Ives, Andrea Sullivan, Joanne Jones, Bala Nikku, Paul Simpson, Sean Donlan

Selected References

The Working Group examined many resources, including articles, books, and websites. The following are those cited within this document, but many more, including hard copies or pdfs, can be provided upon request.

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Appendix B: Forms and Templates

We included all forms from TRU that were available to us, and we created and adapted others to fill apparent gaps. When possible, all forms and templates are in MS Word so departments may revise or adapt them to meet their needs and contexts. CELT is available to help create customized forms and templates as well.

1. **Pre-Observation Meeting Forms**

2. **Various Face-to-face and Virtual Classroom Observation Forms**
   Included are all TRU forms that were available to us, and we created a few new forms as well, including one for virtual delivery. For specialized contexts for which these forms are not sufficient, we encourage departments to contact CELT to help create customized forms and templates.

3. **Sample Forms for Reviewing Non-Instructional Faculty**
   Included are all TRU forms that were available to us plus one created by faculty involved in the pilot project. We encourage departments to adapt these forms to their own contexts; CELT is available to help create customized forms and templates.

4. **Post-observation Meeting Checklist**

5. **Post-review/observation Reflection/Action Plan Templates**

6. **Sample Templates for Departments to Track Peer Reviews and Peer Review Workshop Participants**