On-Site Class Observation Process and Procedures
School of Professional Studies

INTRODUCTION

The class observation process is designed to support SPS faculty in their teaching. The process provides opportunities for faculty to reflect on their teaching and, in collaboration with the observer, assess both teaching skills and learning outcomes. Created to be both supportive and helpful, the process also serves as an effective evaluation tool so that faculty can enhance the quality of the education they are providing to our students. Assessment of teaching effectiveness focuses on mastery of course content, ability to apply appropriate instructional methods for the students we serve, maximizing student engagement in the learning process, and creating learning experiences that link stated learning outcomes to actual student achievement. Because observations will occur at meaningful intervals, faculty will be able to improve their teaching and demonstrate that improvement over time.

OBSERVATION PROCEDURES

The five components to each observation are a pre-observation conversation, the actual on-site observation, a post-observation conversation, completion of the On-Site Class Observation Report, and submission of the final On-Site Class Observation Report.

1. The Pre-Observation Conversation
   The purpose of the pre-observation conversation is to establish the context for the class visit. To establish this context the observer should:

   - Request copies of the syllabus and other materials to be used during the class.
   - Provide the instructor with the SPS Teaching Effectiveness Criteria document that focuses on five components of teaching effectiveness: class management, relevance and mastery of course content, instructor communication skills, quality of student engagement, and effective use of instructional materials.
   - Schedule a conversation with the faculty member being observed. This conversation may take place in person, over the phone, via Skype, or by any other strategy that permits a substantive conversation.
   - Explain the observation process to the faculty member being observed and review the SPS Teaching Effectiveness Criteria document as a tool that begins the conversation about effective teaching.
   - Inquire if the faculty member wants the observer to focus on anything specific to that class or related to his or her teaching style.
   - Ask the instructor to inform the class that a visitor will be in attendance and the class will proceed normally.
2. The On-Site Observation

Many standard teaching observation forms use Likert scales because they are easy and commonly accepted tools for assessment. The disadvantages of Likert scales are that they only provide a general assessment, use limited criteria, and lack reliability unless ratings are very well defined and observers are like minded. Therefore, the SPS classroom observation process does not include any Likert scales and instead, encourages a more open-ended approach.

The process for an on-site observation requires that the observer takes copious notes that can be used later to complete a thorough evaluation. The observer should:

- keep a detailed narrative of what transpires in the classroom and highlight teaching strategies that were particularly effective or could be improved upon.
- observe the class for at least 60 minutes but is encouraged to stay longer if needed to complete a thorough evaluation.
- refer to the SPS Teaching Effectiveness Criteria document as a reminder of some teaching effectiveness indicators but should not feel limited by this list.

3. The Post-Observation Conversation

After the observation, the observer should set-up a meeting with the instructor. If a meeting is not possible, a phone or Skype conversation is acceptable and should be conducted no later than one week after the observation.

The post-observation conversation should be handled in a collegial manner. During an open conversation, the observer should ask the instructor to openly convey perceptions and opinions about the class. The observer should be prepared to reflect on a variety of teaching effectiveness criteria and provide actual examples whenever possible.

Recognizing positive teaching strategies is just as important as identifying areas for improvement. Therefore, the post-observation conversation should begin with a discussion about the most effective teaching strategies observed. Additionally, if superior teaching strategies were observed, both parties should collaborate on ways the instructor could share those strategies with other SPS colleagues.

When discussing areas for improvement, the observer should provide the reasons why a particular strategy seemed less effective and suggest one or more alternatives that could be utilized instead. The observer should ask the instructor if he or she has any ideas for changes that would enhance his or her own teaching effectiveness.

4. Completion of the On-Site Class Observation Report

Within a week of the post-observation conversation, the observer should complete the On-Site Class Observation Report. Thoughtful and detailed comments are essential to this process. The report should include positive and specific feedback about the instructor’s strengths, specifically identify areas for improvement, and reflect on collaborative strategies identified for enhanced teaching that were discussed in the post-observation conversation.
The observer should e-mail a PDF copy of the *On-Site Class Observation Report* to the instructor for review and signature.

5. Submission of the final *On-Site Class Observation Report*

After receiving the *On-site Class Observation Report*, the instructor may elect to add comments but is not required to do so. The instructor must sign the report, scan it, and e-mail it back to the observer within one week of receipt. Once the observer has a signed copy of the report, he or she must submit it to the Academic Director for inclusion in the instructor’s personnel file.

**OBSERVER CREDENTIALS**

Observations must be completed by SPS full-time faculty, Academic Directors, or Associate Deans. Other administrators may not serve as observers. Adjunct faculty may serve as observers if they are approved by the Academic Director or the Associate Dean. All observers must complete the training program sponsored by the Center for Academic Excellence and Support (CAES) before they are eligible to conduct observations.

**SCHEDULE OF OBSERVATIONS FOR NEW FACULTY**

All new SPS adjunct and full-time faculty must be observed during the first semester that they teach and again in the second semester that they teach. If possible, observations should take place in different courses. After the two initial observations, the following schedule applies:

- Adjunct faculty must be observed once every five semesters that they teach, including summer sessions, until a minimum of four observations have been completed.
- Full-time faculty must be observed every two years until a minimum of four observations have been completed.

It is important to note that this schedule reflects the minimum expectations and could change based on a variety of circumstances such as, but not limited to the following:

- Additional observations may need to be completed if an improvement plan has been executed.
- Additional observations may need to be completed if an adjunct or full-time faculty member plans to apply for promotion. A requirement of promotion is the submission of two class observations completed over the past three years.

Once a full-time faculty member has been formally observed at least four times, he or she is required to ask another SPS or NYU faculty member who has been teaching at least three years to attend a class for a peer observation. This request must be made at least once every three years. The observation is less formal, serves as a refresher for the instructor, and is meant to promote interactive discourse about teaching effectiveness.