

## Peer Review of Teaching ([view online here](#))

*“In higher education, peer review stands as the prime means for ensuring that scholarship is of the highest quality, and from it flows consequential assessments that shape careers, disciplines, and entire institutions. While peer review is well established as a means of evaluating research across the disciplines, it is less common in the assessment of teaching. Yet it is no less useful, since it can improve what Ernest Boyer has called the ‘scholarship of teaching and learning’ by enhancing instructional and faculty development, by bolstering the integrity of personnel decisions, and by enabling more intentional and mutually supportive communities of scholar teachers”* ([Bandy, 2015](#)).

**Peer review of teaching (PRT) refers to forms of professional educational development in which faculty can work with colleagues to reflect on instructional practices and how teaching impacts student learning.** PRT can be used to acknowledge effective teaching practices and to identify areas for improvement through critical self-reflection and collaborative teaching evaluations. While student perceptions of teaching—often referred to as course evaluations or student evaluations of teaching—are essential for learning how students perceive their own learning experiences, those measures of student experience are *ineffective as a primary measure for teaching effectiveness*. Researchers examining assessment of educator practices have suggested that student perceptions of teaching are not correlated with student learning or other measures of teaching effectiveness like teacher observation ([Braga, Paccagnella, & Pellizzari, 2014](#); [Hornstein & Law, 2017](#); [Uttl, White, & Gonzales, 2016](#)). Additionally, student course evaluation results tend to be *biased against female instructors* ([Boring, 2017](#); [Fandt & Stevens, 1991](#); [MacNell, Driscoll, & Hunt, 2014](#); [Martin, 2016](#); [Mengel, Sauermann, & Zolitz, 2018](#); [Mitchell & Martin, 2018](#); [Rosen, 2017](#); [Wagner, Rieger, & Voorvelt, 2016](#)). Psychologists have also explored *bias against faculty of color on student evaluations and performance* ([Bascow, Codos, & Martin, 2013](#); [Bavishi, Madera, & Hebl, 2010](#)). Researchers examining over 100 articles related to student evaluations of teaching also documented bias against women and other marginalized groups, and they offered recommendations for ethical reform of teacher evaluation in higher education ([Kreitzer & Sweet-Cushman, 2021](#)).

A small number of higher education institutions have begun to de-emphasize the use of student perceptions of teaching for the purposes of career advancement. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* ([Doerer, 2019](#)) documented the progress of institutions moving away from relying solely on student perception surveys toward *formal peer teaching evaluations, also known as peer review of teaching*. The Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching staff ([Bandy, 2015](#)) created a helpful introduction to the peer review process. The

[University of Southern California](#) documented three primary reasons for redefining teaching excellence through peer review of teaching:

1. Recommendations from three faculty committees over a period of four years
2. Provost's initiatives to elevate the status of teaching
3. Concerns about research findings documenting bias in student evaluations.

In the same documentation, USC is careful to acknowledge that student evaluations are important to acknowledge students' experiences, and that those perceptions are useful to inform teaching practices and course impact.

UCITE generated this Teaching and Learning Brief to provide empirical information about student perceptions of teaching and to offer resources for exploring professional educational development through peer review of teaching. We describe three engagement levels of peer review that range from collegial faculty development opportunities to more comprehensive reviews of teaching and teaching materials.

### **Collegial Faculty Development**

Collegial faculty development opportunities provide structure for peer observations and conversations about teaching and learning. In this formative framework, peer teaching observations are not evaluations, in that no judgment is intended in the process. Observations are meant to be formative, however, in that colleagues may learn more about effective teaching practices, assessment tools, or assistive technology used to innovate student learning. The [UCITE Teachers Observing Teachers Experience \(TOTEs\)](#) is one example of developing a community of scholar practitioners to help improve student learning. [Teaching Squares](#) is another form of cross-, trans-, or inter-disciplinary teaching development that brings small pods of faculty together through a sequence of observation and self-reflection. UCITE can assist with the creation of Teaching Squares through our [Teaching Consultations and Observations services](#).

### **Peer Review of Teaching**

UCITE refers to Peer Review of Teaching (PRT) as a more formalized process of critical evaluation of effective teaching. The PRT process might be used formatively, as peers observe and evaluate classroom teaching using field notes and evaluation templates over a period of time. PRT may also be used as a summative measure of effective teaching in which formal written evaluations are submitted as evidence of effective teaching for the purposes of career advancement. Peer evaluators may wish to undergo training to more accurately measure effective teaching through a measured review of course materials, teaching observations, and pre/post observation conversations. UCITE can curate PRT templates to help align the measurement process with departmental or unit goals.

### **Comprehensive Review of Teaching and Teaching Materials**

Higher education institutions that incorporate summative peer review of teaching into the career advancement process typically evaluate teaching observations with critical analysis of teacher portfolio materials. The University of Colorado, Boulder and the University of Kansas received an NSF Grant to develop and implement a [Teaching Quality Framework](#).

*“Peer review of teaching should include a detailed analysis of the instructor’s plan for learning, including material selection, targeted goals for students, methods of measuring learning, indicators of success in learning, and use of time with students during scheduled classes, studios, and labs. Thus, a high-quality course-focused peer review requires conversation between the reviewer and course instructor, organized around a portfolio of course materials. The peer review may also include observation of one or more class periods, with a conversation before and after the observation. The reviewer should produce a document that summarizes the findings of the peer review”* ([KU Center for Teaching Excellence](#)).

These institutions curated empirical research and materials from the Science of Teaching literature to develop a flexible campus approach for evaluating teaching effectiveness that allows for discipline-defined processes. A team of faculty members from another institution developed a framework for assessing teaching effectiveness that measures four comprehensive elements of “optimized teaching:”

1. Course design
2. Scholarly teaching
3. Learner centeredness
4. Professional development

([Simonson, Earl, & Frary, 2021](#))

A more comprehensive approach to PRT takes into account preparatory activities (e.g. course development), course alignment (e.g. learning objectives measured by corresponding assessment tools that also align with planned learning activities), and teacher observations. UCITE faculty and staff colleagues are available to discuss these comprehensive teaching evaluation materials and the potential for implementation in a particular CWRU unit. Email us at [ucite@case.edu](mailto:ucite@case.edu).

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This information can also be found at <https://case.edu/ucite/peer-review-of-teaching>.

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