# DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR PEER REVIEW OF TEACHING

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## 1. Background

A peer review of teaching represents one of several approaches available to enhance one's teaching skills. However, a peer review, in and of itself, will not provide adequate or complete data on which to base decisions to improve one's teaching. In addition to requesting a peer review, faculty are encouraged to rely on multiple approaches including self-evaluations, student classroom ratings, student interviews, measurement of growth in student learning, review of video/audio recordings of classes, and senior exit interviews.

Against this background, the purpose of this document is to guide the execution of peer reviews of teaching in a constructive, uniform, and consistent manner. These guidelines are intended to promote best practices in conducting and reporting peer reviews of teaching with the goal of advancing the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Peer reviews are useful both for evaluating the teaching programs of candidates for tenure and promotion and for guiding the continuing improvement of teaching by all faculty members. A faculty member who becomes more effective and efficient at teaching will enhance the student's ability to learn, will contribute more effectively to the instructional mission of the department, and will further his/her own professional growth.

## 2. Procedure for Conducting Peer Reviews

### 2.1 Timing of Review

Untenured faculty generally should have taught a course once before being reviewed. Teaching by tenure-track faculty should be reviewed twice before the tenure deliberation begins, although conducting two reviews may prove difficult for those starting the pre-tenure period with credit for service elsewhere. An evaluation of teaching of tenured faculty should be conducted every three to four years. No more than one course taught by a faculty member should be reviewed per semester.

## 2.2 Selection of the Review Team.

At least two faculty members, one of whom may be from outside the department, should serve on the peer review team. Participation of faculty from the Academy of Teaching Excellence is encourage (see https://www.ate.cider.vt.edu/ATEwinners.html for a list). Inclusion of a staff member from the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) also is encouraged with the understanding that any comments from CETL staff will be shared with the Department Head and the Department of Fish and Wildlife Promotion and Tenure Committee. Faculty should note that staff from the CETL are available to conduct confidential peer observations at the request of the instructor (see https://www.ate.cider.vt.edu/ATEwinners.html for details).The Department Head and the faculty member to be evaluated should meet to agree upon candidates for the peer review team. Faculty asked to serve on peer review teams should have experience in teaching in the university setting and at least one member should be technically competent in the discipline of the class to be evaluated. The Department Head will appoint the peer review team and designate one person to serve as Chair.

## 2.3 Preparing for the Review

The peer review team and the faculty member being reviewed should meet prior to the review to discuss materials the candidate will provide to the peer review team prior to classroom observations and any activities to be undertaken during the review.

## 2.4 Conducting the Review

Data supporting the review should be collected from different sources, which should include the course syllabus, class notes, assignments, observation of classroom or laboratory activities, and review of quiz and examination materials. Other items that may be examined by the peer review team include, but are not limited to grading rubrics, graded examinations, final grade assignment criteria, grade distributions, measurements of student learning, books and reference materials, and an overview of the responsibilities of teaching assistants. Typically, the faculty member would assign guest access to the course webhosting site (currently Canvas) so that all peer reviewers could access the materials made available to students.

At least two observations of classroom activities (scheduled with the permission of the instructor) may be conducted by each reviewer for each course. Students enrolled in the classes to be reviewed should be informed that a review is underway and that it is a normal part of a constructive process for improvement of instruction.

## 2.5 Reporting Results of the Review

The peer review team will prepare a draft narrative summary based upon the evaluation criteria listed below that are appropriate for the course. The report should highlight the strengths of the faculty member, areas needing improvement, offer constructive suggestions for strengthening these areas, and provide an overall summary statement of the faculty member's effectiveness as a teacher. If there are external constraints related to facilities, equipment, or GTA support, these should be mentioned as well as suggestions for steps the department, college, or university could

take to resolve these constraints. The team may recommend to the instructor readings or participation in CETL workshops that might strengthen the instructor's pedagogy. The peer review team should share the report with the Department Head and faculty member under review before meeting with the faculty member to address questions and allow the faculty member to rebut or question any of the findings.

After the peer review team meets with the faculty member to share their observations, they will prepare a final written report that will be shared with the faculty member and the department head. The faculty member may respond in writing to the review if they find that appropriate. Any response from the faculty will be appended to the final report.

## 2. Guidelines for the Peer Review Report

The organization of and topics covered in a peer review of teaching report can and should vary among courses and instructors, and as a result of the goals established in the initial meeting (section 2.3). Hence, the guidelines set out below are suggestive of the possible structure and content of a peer review report, but are not prescriptive. Underlined sections should be included in most reports and effort should be made to minimize report size (i.e., reports should not exceed two to three pages unless substantive corrective actions are suggested).

1. _General information_
    1.1. Course number and title
    1.2. Instructor
    1.3. Review team
    1.4. Specific information on the course
        1.4.1. Level (undergraduate, advanced undergraduate, graduate)
        1.4.2. Semester and year
        1.4.3. Student enrollment
        1.4.4. Type of course (lecture, laboratory, discussion, …)
        1.4.5. Is this a required, restricted elective, or elective course?

2. _Evaluation of course content and preparation_ *(This section of the report will depend heavily on materials provided by the instructor.)*
    2.1. Course syllabus
        2.1.1. Are the learning objective and scope of coverage appropriate and clearly indicated?
        2.1.2. Are topics, exam dates, etc, well communicated?
        2.1.3. Are course requirements (reading assignments, projects, etc) clearly communicated?
    2.2. Teaching materials
        2.2.1. Are handouts well organized?
        2.2.2. Are visual aids appropriate and high quality?
        2.2.3. Does the instructor use computer technology appropriately?
        2.2.4. Are there special demonstrations or other teaching aids?

2.3. Subject matter of course

    2.3.1. Does the instructor present important concepts and information?

    2.3.2. Are lecture and handout materials current? Is the course updated each time it is taught?

    2.3.3. Is the instructor knowledgeable and able to explain the material?

    2.3.4. Do the lectures and exercises match the course level and student ability?

    2.3.5. Is the level of rigor and effort appropriate to the course level?

2.4. Examinations

    2.4.1. What type(s) of examinations are administered?

    2.4.2. Is the exam format appropriate to the course materials, objectives, and class size?

    2.4.3. Are examinations appropriately rigorous?

    2.4.4. Are exams fair (e.g., do the questions cover key topics?)?

2.5. Class administration

    2.5.1. Are deadlines clearly defined?

    2.5.2. Does the instructor grade and return examinations and other assignments promptly?

    2.5.3. Are students given the opportunity to discuss exam results or other assignments with the instructor?

    2.5.4. Are grading criteria clearly stated in the syllabus or other handouts?

2.6. Special class projects, if applicable

    2.6.1. Is there a clear description of each project? Are the objectives and purpose clearly stated?

    2.6.2. Does the project effectively enhance the lecture or laboratory learning experience?

    2.6.3. Are the criteria for project evaluation appropriate and clearly stated?

2.7. Evaluation of laboratory class content and materials

    2.7.1. What type of laboratory is at issue (e.g., demonstrations or student exercises)?

    2.7.2. Are handouts or laboratory manual appropriate and high quality?

    2.7.3. Are the organization, materials, and execution of the laboratory appropriate to the course content?

    2.7.4. Are the exercises of appropriate length?

    2.7.5. Are the laboratories effective?

2.8. Other

    2.8.1. If appropriate, does the instructor make effective use of guest lectures?

    2.8.2. Does the instructor interact with and utilize the graduate teaching assistant appropriately? Does the GTA receive meaningful teaching experience?

    2.8.3. Is the instructor available for consultation with students? For example, are office hours set aside before or after class? If appropriate, does the instructor set up study or review sessions?

3. *Classroom performance*

3.1. Lecture classes

    3.1.1. Organization

    3.1.1.1.  Are lectures well organized and presented clearly?

    3.1.1.2.  Is the purpose stated at the beginning?

    3.1.1.3.  Are topics presented in a logical fashion?

    3.1.1.4.  Are relevant examples and case studies integrated into class activities?

    3.1.1.5.  Are topics summarized and important points occasionally restated?

   3.1.2. Communication skills

    3.1.2.1.  Does the instructor lecture at an appropriate rate?

    3.1.2.2.  Is the presentation substantially free of annoying mannerisms and speech fillers (okay, um, ah, etc.)?

    3.1.2.3.  Through non-verbal communication, what sort of image does the instructor project?

    3.1.2.4.  Does the instructor communicate effectively with students?

    3.1.2.5.   Is the instructor enthusiastic, stimulating, and challenging?

   3.1.3. Visual Aids

    3.1.3.1.  Are visuals well designed, utilized, and integrated into the lecture?

    3.1.3.2.  What types of visual aids are used? Are they appropriate? Can improvements be made using other media?

   3.1.4. Questioning

    3.1.4.1.  Does the instructor handle questions well?

    3.1.4.2.  Are questions encouraged?

    3.1.4.3.  Does the instructor limit questions when necessary because of time, to prevent tangents, etc.?

   3.1.5. Instructor-Student Interactions

    *3.1.5.1.  Does the instructor interact well with students?*

    *3.1.5.2.  Does the instructor encourage discussion?*

    *3.1.5.3.  Do students respond well to the instructor?*

   3.1.6. Teaching and Learning Style

    3.1.6.1.  Does the instructor use an appropriate range of alternative approaches to learning?

    3.1.6.2.  Does the instructor, for example, use demonstrations, participatory exercises, small discussion groups, etc.?

 3.2. <u>Laboratory classes (when applicable):</u>

   3.2.1. Are opening remarks and instructions clearly presented?

   3.2.2. Are the objectives and significance of the laboratory clearly indicated?

   3.2.3. Is the approach to the laboratory enthusiastic and stimulating?

   3.2.4. Are procedures suitable for achieving the stated objectives?

   3.2.5. Are laboratories properly supervised by the instructor or GTA?

   3.2.6. Are students effectively encouraged to put forth needed effort?

   3.2.7. Is proper attention paid to safety?

   *3.2.8.* Are laboratory objectives and exercises integrated with course content and related back to lecture presentations?

4. *Summary evaluation and recommendations*

4.1. including, as appropriate, specific suggestions for reading and further training (e.g., CETL workshops), or other methods to improve instructional effectiveness of the faculty member evaluated.