Developing and Implementing Peer Review of Academic Librarians’ Teaching: An Overview and Case Report
by
Loanne Snavely and Nancy H. Dewald

Abstract

Peer review is one form of evaluation for library teaching. It may be initially planned in answer to institutional desires for accountability, but it has several advantages for academic librarians. As formative assessment, a peer review can provide valuable opportunities for developing teaching expertise for librarians. As summative assessment it can be used to document a librarian’s development and expertise for many purposes such as annual reviews, promotion and tenure reviews, or merit increases. This article reviews the literature on peer review of teaching in higher education and in academic libraries and outlines the requirements for developing a fair and consistent process for peer assessment of teaching within the academic library setting that meets the needs of an individual institution, using Penn State University Libraries’ program of peer assessment as a model. This program, implemented over more than seven years, has proved successful in promoting thoughtful and effective teaching, supporting collegial discussions on teaching, encouraging a climate that values teaching, and enhancing student engagement in the classroom.

Introduction

Libraries are always searching for ways to document, assess, and promote the unique teaching done by faculty librarians in a way that is credible and understandable to those both inside and outside the library, and peer review of teaching is one way of doing this. While the impetus for developing such an assessment may come through a Promotion and Tenure process or a charge from the administration, it should not begin and end with that goal in mind. Evaluation of academic library teaching should be conducted for multiple reasons including instruction librarians’ development and instruction program improvement, while it may also be required for accountability to the University administration and faculty.

Assessment of teaching may be formative or summative, depending on how the results are used. Formative assessment of one’s instruction is designed to provide feedback to instructors so that they will be able to improve their performance. It should give them clear constructive advice so that they know how they can improve. The term comes from the idea that it is given while instructors are ‘forming’ or developing, in this case, their teaching ability. Summative assessment provides the final judgment, or ‘summary’, of the person’s performance as a teacher. Library instruction evaluation has been used for a variety of purposes, including improvement of librarians’ teaching ability (formative purpose), professional review of librarians for continuing appointment, tenure, or promotion decisions (summative purpose), and improvement (formative) or review (summative) of the library instruction program.

This article is intended to explore peer evaluation of teaching in higher education in general and of library instruction in particular, then propose a methodology for the development of a set of practices of peer review of course-related library instruction for an individual institution, using the practices
undertaking

In the 1990s, McKeachie13 observed. Ducommun led a library evaluation project, designed by Lee Shulman and Charles Ducommun, that was the first to begin outlining the many aspects and considerations of peer review of teaching as discovered through a series of prompts given to faculty at the participating universities.15

Higher Education Context
Vibrant discussion of peer review of credit instruction took place in the higher education literature in the 1990s, and some of those sources are still used heavily today. Now peer review is a well-established part of the evaluation of members of the teaching faculty in postsecondary institutions. Although evaluation of teaching in the United States is more than a century old, it was first primarily student evaluation, and gradually additional methods were developed.1 In 1990 the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching urged faculty to evaluate teaching through self-assessment, student evaluation, and peer evaluation.2 Just as universities developed teaching evaluation as a response to the demand for accountability to their students and the public, academic libraries have been asked by their universities to evaluate library instruction. As a result, academic librarians have taken elements of teaching faculty member’s experiences for developing methods of library instruction evaluation, including peer evaluation.

Resources on peer review of teaching caution that peer review is but one element in the evaluation and improvement of teaching, the other important element being student evaluations.3 Self reflection or self assessment is frequently reported as occurring either separately or as part of the peer review process.4 Some researchers additionally recommend videotaping of instruction5; “nonjudgmental descriptions” of the instructor’s teaching by administrators or even consultants as well as peers6; development of a teaching portfolio7; and assessment of student learning or student outcomes8.

Larry A. Braskamp, Dale C. Brandenburg, and John C. Ory9 assert that peers, unlike students, can best evaluate the instructor’s knowledge, course objectives, and student projects, and this is echoed by others.10 Braskamp et al. recommend more than one peer reviewer and more than one class to be observed. During the pre-observation meeting, in addition to giving the observer course materials and discussing the objectives of the class(es), the “[o]bserved instructors may also suggest concerns and course dimensions on which they would like feedback.”11 They recommend written, open-ended evaluations rather than checklists or rating scales. They also highly recommend post-observation discussion in which the instructor can respond to the observations.

Larry Keig and Michael D. Waggoner12 recommend that formative evaluation to improve teaching be entirely separate from summative evaluation. They also recommend that the faculty should take the lead in setting up the peer evaluation program. James England, Pat Hutchings, and Wilbert J. McKeachie13 state that the greatest value of a system of peer evaluation of teaching is if it creates a culture of ongoing teaching improvement. Robert D. Prichard, Margaret D. Watson, Karlease Kelly, and Anthony R. Paquin14, like Keig and Waggoner, recommend faculty involvement in setting up the peer evaluation system, in order to assure acceptance. They describe the design process, including identifying objectives and indicators, and issues of implementation.

In 1995, the American Association of Higher Education published a project workbook on an innovative undertaking in which twelve universities joined forces in a project designed by Lee Shulman and Charles Ducommun from Stanford University and directed by Pat Hutchings. This workbook, published midway through the project, was the first to begin outlining the many aspects and considerations of peer review of teaching as discovered through a series of prompts given to faculty at the participating universities.15

developed and implemented over the course of seven years at the Pennsylvania State University Libraries as a model.
Nancy Van Note Chism provides an excellent overview of the entire process of setting up a peer review system. She includes sample forms for evaluating course materials, and guidelines and sample forms for classroom observation. She states that formative assessment should be ongoing, while summative assessment should be periodic in order to obtain “a reasonable sampling.” Class visitations should be by invitation only, because even though it will no doubt be the instructor’s best example of teaching, the other sources of evaluation will reveal whether or not this is representative. She also states that for formative assessment, confidentiality is essential.

Christopher Knapper and Patricia Cranton discuss formative evaluation of teaching in terms of faculty in a discipline working together to develop a “scholarship of teaching and learning” which will improve practice, and they see peer review is a key part of that process. Writing for elementary and secondary teachers, Dwight W. Allen and Alyce C. LeBlanc describe the “2+2 performance appraisal model” in which a peer observer will “identify two compliments and two suggestions for improvement,” beginning a discussion of strengths and weaknesses for the improvement of teaching. Likewise, Barbara Gottesman describes a system of peer coaching for all levels of educators, and she includes sample scenarios and dialogues.

Deborah Minter describes the process of “collaborative classroom inquiry” that she used in a graduate seminar for English composition teaching assistants. She first had “collaborative teams form around a shared pedagogical question, interest, or concern.” The teams share course goals and materials and develop “guiding questions or lines of attention” to direct their classroom observations. After observing each other’s teaching, each team makes a written response to their pedagogical questions based on their observations, and each individual writes a brief reflection of their experience of this process. This is a valuable method for the improvement of teaching, and indeed Minter does not use it for summative purposes.

Ronald A. Berk encourages peer review for formative purposes, but only optionally for summative purposes. His book provides guidance on how to develop effective scales for peer observation and student ratings, noting that peer scales should complement student scales, that is, they should reflect aspects that students could not rate but a peer could. The book also includes sample scales, including three peer observation scales.

Deborah DeZure discusses methods for reducing bias and increasing reliability in the process of peer observation of teaching. She describes various methods of selecting observers and states that “observer training is essential.” It is also important for the department to agree on “what constitutes good teaching in the discipline.” She discusses the pros and cons of checklists and narratives and recommends a combination of checklists and “open narratives.” Dezure also recommends that the instructor should have an opportunity to respond to the observer’s preliminary report before its final version is submitted, as this will “reframe evaluation as something that happens with a person, not to a person.” She adds that if the instructor and observer cannot agree, the instructor should have the option of submitting a response to the final report.

Academic Libraries Context
Academic librarians for the most part have not embraced peer review of course-related instruction. A review of the library literature finds a variety of methods used for evaluating instruction, but peer evaluation is not often used, and it is rarely employed for both formative and summative purposes.
Christopher Bober, Sonia Poulin, and Luigina Vileno reviewed the literature on evaluating library instruction from 1980 to 1993, discovering a focus on students. They found that librarians reported looking at students’ achievement and/or attitudes toward the library and toward their own library skills. Librarians used either pre- and post-tests or just post-instruction tests of students’ learning; questionnaires; or a combination of tests and questionnaires. Additionally, some reported having students keep a research diary, while others evaluated students’ bibliographies.28

Bober et al. also state that library instruction evaluation reported between 1980 and 1993 was conducted for purposes of program improvement, development of instruction librarians, and accountability to faculty, administrators, legislative bodies, and accreditation bodies.29

Patrick Ragains surveyed academic libraries in the United States in 1997 on the various practices for library instruction evaluation. He found observation by peers or by a library instruction coordinator (which he identified as also a peer) to be most common. Other methods included student evaluations, faculty evaluations, tests of students’ learning, and assessment by a supervisor by observation of teaching or assessment of handouts. Due to the constraints of course-related instruction, he concluded that “subjective data alone are inadequate to measure student learning, guide programmatic improvements in library instruction, or be used as a basis for librarians’ performance appraisals.”30

The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) surveyed its member libraries in 2003 on the topic of evaluating library instruction. A little over half (54%) of ARL libraries responded to the survey, and of those, 63% reported that they “formally assess the effectiveness of the library instruction program.”31 Results of instruction evaluation were primarily used for program improvement or review. See Table 1.32 Summative purposes are reflected in the use of feedback for staff evaluation (41%), tenure and promotion review (25%), and post-tenure review (9%). Comments from several respondents noted that instruction librarians use the feedback for their own instructional improvement. In some cases this formative use is in addition to summative use, and in other cases the feedback is exclusively for the librarian to see (that is, for formative purposes only).

Table 133

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For what purposes does the library use feedback on library instruction? Check all that apply. (n=44)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feedback is used for:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program improvement</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program review</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing purpose</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff training</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff evaluation</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User satisfaction survey</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure and promotion review</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget considerations</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff hiring</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post tenure review</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, please specify</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The ARL survey also asked, “What aspect of the instruction session is the assessment instrument designed to evaluate? Check all that apply.” Forty-three responding libraries reported on session participant evaluation and faculty evaluation of library instruction, but there was no mention of peer evaluation, even in the comments from respondents. Participant evaluation was most common (79-93%) while faculty evaluation was included in 51-67% of ARL libraries. See Table 2.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What aspect of the instruction session is the assessment instrument designed to evaluate? Check all that apply. (n=43)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session participants assess content of instruction</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session participants assess their own learning</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session participants assess the instructor’s presentation skills</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty assess content of the instruction session</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty assess student learning related to the instruction session</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty assess the instructor’s presentation skills</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, please specify</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several academic libraries have reported using peer evaluation of library instruction for formative purposes only. Dennis Isbell and Lisa Kammerlocher described peer evaluations at Arizona State University West which were employed only for developmental uses, writing that evaluation for summative purposes is qualitatively different than that for formative purposes and discourages experimentation. Isbell and Kammerlocher describe the use of student evaluations, faculty evaluations, and peer evaluations, all for the individual librarian’s instructional improvement. Linda Norbury reported that “peer observation is an effective method for improving the quality of teaching,” both for the observed and the observer. Several writers describe taking formative peer observation of instruction librarians a step further to “peer coaching” or “constructive peer evaluation” to create a culture of instructional improvement. Dale Vidmar discusses “reflective peer coaching” in which the peer coach may not observe the instructor at all, but simply helps him/her to reflect constructively on the teaching process.

Alone in reporting peer evaluation of instruction librarians for summative purposes is Cheryl Middleton, who described the development of peer evaluation of teaching at Oregon State University Libraries. There it began as voluntary, formative evaluation, then became mandated by the University for promotion and tenure (summative) purposes. She found that evaluations by students and faculty focused on how well the library instruction met the needs of the class, whereas peer evaluation provided more in-depth evaluation of the librarian’s knowledge and of the appropriateness of the teaching materials and activities. In addition, librarians benefited both as observers and observed, from the process of instruction assessment.

Peer evaluation discussions on the American Library Association’s Information Literacy Instruction listserv (ILI-L) in 2003 and 2006 elicited examples of peer coaching, that is, where the evaluation of the instructor is primarily for the purpose of professional development, and only optionally (at the discretion of the librarian being evaluated) for professional evaluation. A May 2010 ILI-L discussion initiated by Spencer Jardine on peer review of library instruction included specific examples of forms
used and questions for the peer reviewers.  

Developing a Peer Review Process

“To be effective, peer review of teaching must be situated within a system that emphasizes the value of teaching to the institution and articulates a thoughtful and comprehensive approach to the evaluation of teaching. Developing and implementing such a system requires leadership at each administrative level.”

For an academic library, implementing a process of peer review will require the support of the library administration, the administrator(s) responsible for the teaching program, and the teaching librarians. The first step is to ensure there is a clear statement of the value of teaching. This should appear in the library’s mission statement, statement of core values, criteria for promotion and tenure or other library-wide document that is formally accepted and public.

Chism outlines a series of questions that can guide the development of peer review to meet the needs of a particular institution and notes that work for developing such systems needs to occur at the departmental level, adapting them for the specific teaching needs and requirements of that department. Revising and adapting these specifically for the implementation of a process of peer review of teaching for the types of teaching done in an academic library context might include the following questions:

Whose teaching will be evaluated? Will all librarians who teach be evaluated? Or will peer review only apply to pre-tenure librarians, or only to librarians with a significant teaching load, etc.?

What is the purpose of the peer reviews? Will they be used for improvement of teaching? For documenting teaching strengths and weaknesses for the annual evaluation? For promotion and tenure review? For reappointment? For salary or merit increases?

Will peer reviews be formative or summative? If both, will they be separate systems? Or a combination?

Have teaching standards been articulated in terms of class design, materials, classroom performance, use of hands-on strategies, etc.?

How will teaching evidence be collected?

How will teaching evaluation be systematized, and what support will be needed?

How will the plan be developed and by whom? Who needs to be involved? Will a small task force or committee make recommendations? How will the entire group that will be affected have input?

How will the plan be documented and communicated?

How will the plan be monitored, adjusted and revised in the future?

Using these questions as guideposts for making decisions and developing a plan, an individual library can create a process for peer review of teaching adapted to their needs, their teaching program, and their
organizational structure. At Penn State these questions were considered and a process developed that could meet the needs of both the library administration and the library faculty.

**Developing a Peer Review System for the Penn State University Libraries**

Library faculty members at Penn State have traditionally undergone formal peer review and Student Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness (SRTE) for any credit courses they taught, according to the guidelines for all university faculty. However, most teaching by library faculty is as a guest in another course or for a variety of other audiences. We have a robust program of liaison with disciplinary departments and conduct several thousand instructional sessions each year. Thus much of the teaching done by the librarians did not fall under the university’s required guidelines for teaching evaluation of credit courses. During the promotion and tenure process, an individual library faculty member’s dossier would include any credit course they had taught in the teaching section of the dossier, and then in the librarianship section a list of classes taught along with the numbers of students reached would be included. At their own initiation and discretion, a few librarians conducted some assessments of their teaching and shared it with their administrators or in their dossiers, but most frequently there was no assessment included. Promotion and tenure committees and library administrators therefore had little if any information on which to assess the teaching being done by librarians, many of whom had a considerable teaching load as part of their primary responsibilities. As issues arose related to teaching assessment in the promotion and tenure process, they were brought to the Dean and the Libraries’ administration. Clearly, some sort of assessment to document the quality of teaching, and not just the quantity of teaching, was needed for annual reviews and tenure and promotion decisions. An additional consideration was that while annual reviews and pre-tenure (2nd and 4th year) reviews remain within the University Libraries, the sixth year final tenure review and accompanying documentation are reviewed by the University-wide Promotion and Tenure Committee, as well as by the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and the University President. The Libraries needed to find a way to document, assess, and even promote this unique teaching done by faculty librarians in a way that was credible and understandable to those outside the library who would be reviewing and passing judgment on library faculty dossiers. Thus, the Dean of University Libraries charged a faculty committee of librarians “to develop a form of assessment that is credible to faculty and administrators across the University community.”

The group charged was the Curricular and Instructional Affairs committee of the Library Faculty Organization (hereafter referred to as “the committee“). The committee had a significant task, since evaluation of teaching is a sensitive issue and often even the suggestion of teaching assessment may cause resistance and apprehension in any group of faculty who have been teaching without any required assessment. The committee was charged with designing a method of assessment that could be used in the evaluative process, but it was not limited in what it could recommend. After careful deliberation, the committee felt it was important to include both formative and summative assessment, so that librarians could receive constructive feedback through which they might improve their teaching before receiving an evaluation that would affect their annual review and eventually their tenure and promotion. Supervisors, in collaboration with those undergoing evaluation, are expected to assist in arranging formative assessment and otherwise work with teaching librarians to help them to improve their instruction. The University Libraries encourage librarians who teach to seek formative assessment and other paths to improve their instruction, such as one-on-one coaching, seminars, workshops, and consultation with Library Learning Services. This is all within a structure of support for each person’s improvement as an instructor.

**Instructional Improvement Framework**
While the impetus for developing the assessment came originally through the Promotion and Tenure process and a charge from the Dean of University Libraries, the committee felt the process could not begin and end with that goal in mind. The foregoing literature emphasizes formative assessment for instructional improvement, and the library faculty committee recognized that teaching evaluation needed to be part of a larger framework for the improvement of teaching. They felt it could be intimidating, or even unfair, to use evaluation of librarians’ course-related instruction for their reviews without also offering a support structure to help librarians improve their teaching. In response to these suggestions, the committee recommended the addition of a formative component. Kenneth A. Feldman and Michael B. Paulsen have outlined features of a “supportive teaching culture,”49 some of which the Penn State University Libraries incorporates. Specifically, the University Libraries:

- require a demonstration of teaching in the interview process for those positions in which teaching is part of the librarian’s primary assignment
- promote teaching as a core library service
- recognize excellent teaching in annual reviews and tenure and promotion decisions

Another feature Feldman and Paulsen report is a “faculty development program or campus teaching center.”50 The Penn State University Libraries:

- provide funds for librarians to attend workshops on library instruction outside the University such as the ACRL Immersion Program,
- encourage librarians to participate in workshops and courses on teaching offered by the Universities’ Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence, especially their regular offering of their “Course on College Teaching” (http://www.schreyerinstitute.psu.edu/CCT/) which combines a collaborative learning environment with a seminar on pedagogy that prepares participants to design and implement both practical and reflective instructional activities.
- and the department of Library Learning Services offers individual assistance and topical workshops to instruction librarians.

Methods of Instruction Evaluation at Penn State University Libraries

In addition to this support structure, the University Libraries approached teaching evaluation using both formative and summative assessment, and using multiple methods of collecting information. Peer review is required, student and faculty feedback are strongly encouraged, and a teaching portfolio is entirely optional. Our practice reflects that reported in the ARL survey.51

Student Feedback:

Librarians at many academic libraries use student feedback forms, and there are many versions of these forms. The simplest is the well-known one-minute paper, where students are asked to write down one new thing they learned and one thing they are still confused about. Questionnaires vary widely, and good examples have been collected by the Library Instruction Round Table of the American Library Association.52 Student questionnaires can include the following question types, as reported in the ARL survey53:

- Student self-assessment after instruction, in which students assess their own skills, such as whether they feel more able to use the library catalog or databases based on the instruction given.
- Assessment of the helpfulness of instruction for completing the assignment.
- Assessment of the instructor’s (i.e., the librarian’s) presentation skills.
- Assessment of students’ attitude toward the library and/or the librarians, that is, whether they feel more comfortable using the library or asking a librarian for help.
Some student questionnaires are given immediately following the library instruction session, while some are given later in the semester, particularly if they are asking students how helpful the instruction was for completing the research required.

**Faculty Feedback:**
Faculty members for whom course-related library instruction is provided may be asked for feedback either informally, through a private discussion after the class, or formally, through a questionnaire. Again, the questions posed to faculty at Penn State are like those at other ARL libraries. Faculty may be asked to:
- Assess the content of the library instruction, particularly as to its relevance and usefulness for the class assignment
- Assess student learning from the session
- Assess the presentation skills of the librarian
- Provide suggestions for improvement

Timing of the feedback request to faculty may be either immediately following the library instruction session or later in the semester, after research assignments have been turned in.

The University Libraries strongly encourage all teaching librarians at Penn State to solicit feedback from students and/or faculty as part of their instructional improvement (formative) and also for their summative assessment.

**Peer Evaluation:**
Peer evaluation at Penn State has been fashioned after that done for the teaching faculty. It involves several steps:
- First the peer reviewer meets with the librarian being evaluated ahead of time to discuss the objectives of the instruction session,
- Second, the peer reviewer observes the class,
- Third, the peer reviewer meets again with the librarian to provide feedback.
- Finally, the peer evaluator writes a letter, following an outline that tells the writer what elements to include.

More detailed information on this process will follow. Peer review is the only form of assessment that is required of all teaching librarians at Penn State.

**Teaching Portfolio:**
A teaching portfolio is meant to pull together multiple aspects of a library instructor’s teaching. It may include his/her philosophy of instruction; documentation of his/her teaching activities, including lists of classes taught, examples of handouts/web pages/research guides, examples of active learning activities and other teaching methods; and reflections on teaching, connecting the documentation to the philosophy.

At Penn State, teaching portfolios may be included in the supplemental file of the librarian’s tenure dossier, however teaching portfolios are entirely optional. Several librarians have created teaching portfolios and used them very effectively to document their teaching in the promotion and tenure process. Most recently a few library faculty members have begun using online teaching portfolios.

**Selecting Evaluative Processes**
Many discussions occurred regarding the type of evaluation that would be the fairest and most acceptable to both the library faculty and the library administration for a required method of evaluation. There were advantages and positive aspects to all of them, but there were also concerns regarding some of them. For example, there was a hesitancy to rely on student evaluations for a guest instructional session where the librarian has only a limited time to establish rapport and relationships with students. In addition, many arguments for the use of peers resonated with the library faculty. For example, Chism notes the importance of teaching excellence being defined “by peers sensitive to the particulars of the teaching environment and engaged in an activity that requires attention to the nature of expertise.” She continues that characteristics of effective teaching “require interpretation and application to specific settings. Judging whether certain sequencing of content or the use of certain metaphors and examples is helpful can be done most effectively by others who understand the discipline and setting.” Batista advocates peers as the best for judging a list of ten faculty behaviors including subject matter, what to teach, most appropriate methodologies for teaching specific content areas, personal and professional attributes, and attitude, among others. The evaluation of teaching must mirror the complexity of the teaching itself.

The pros and cons of each method were discussed and weighed, with the final recommendation being that all of the methods listed above were recommended for librarians to use, but the one method that would be required was the peer evaluation of teaching. This method was judged by the committee to promise the greatest opportunity to consider and weigh the teaching abilities of librarians within the context of course-related and guest teaching on a one-time or short term basis. It also promised the most opportunity to provide developmental suggestions and opportunity for growth. Thus the committee recommended, and the faculty and administration approved a set of guidelines that required peer evaluation and strongly encouraged the other forms of assessment listed above.

Establishing a Process

In addition to determining the forms of assessment to be used, the committee recommended answers to a variety of the questions enumerated above, especially as they pertained to the one required element – the peer review of teaching.

The following were among the recommendations:

The purpose of Peer Review Activities should be both formative and summative, with different timelines for each. Formative assessment should occur during the first two years, while summative assessment should begin after that. Summative assessments would continue to provide suggestions for improvement or directions for exploration.

Many considerations came in to play in determining who would conduct the reviews. The constraints used for peer review of credit courses, such as a rank higher than the faculty member under review, did not need to apply. In addition, the work load created in observing classes and writing reviews would need to be spread as widely as possible. There were also concerns that a librarian might be “assigned” a reviewer who would not understand his or her teaching style. Therefore, the recommendation was that any full-time faculty member selected by the librarian could be invited to conduct the review. Reviewers did not have to be tenure-line, although they most often would be. They also were not required to have any particular rank, although it was recognized that more experienced teachers were likely to be better able to judge the teaching of others. Finally, any faculty member, from the University Libraries or from any other Penn State Department, College or Campus could serve as a peer reviewer.
An important component in the deliberations was who would select the reviewer. In the final recommendation, the librarian under review would select the reviewer in consultation with their department head, mentor or other librarians. Library faculty from smaller campuses at a distance may have a more limited number of choices for peer reviewers, but accommodations, such as bringing a librarian from another campus to conduct a peer review, have been made when needed. Over the years we have found that most reviewers are tenure line librarians with a rank higher than that of the librarian being reviewed.

In determining which class will be reviewed, DeZure advises that regardless of whether the instructor, a committee, the observer or an administrator decides on which class will be observed, the most important element in defining that decision is consistency. She notes that inequity can arise from selecting a difficult class for one instructor while allowing another to choose their favorite class. In addition to equity, DeZure comments on the extensive debate surrounding announced or unannounced visits. She concludes, “In balance, announced visits have the potential to be highly productive, and unannounced visits have the sole advantage of catching people who are underachieving.” In our case, the librarian under review was given the opportunity to determine which class would be reviewed. They would have the flexibility to choose one they felt would lend itself to the reviewer’s ability to observe the range of their teaching abilities. In practice, it is often the case that the schedule of the classes being taught by the librarian under review and the availability of the reviewer are the most likely elements that determine which class will be observed.

**Implementing the Process**

First, a pre observation meeting will be conducted, then the class will be observed, a post observation meeting is conducted, and finally a letter is written to summarize the review.

At the meeting held before the class observation, discussion may include the following:

- Level of the class, information about the course
- Interactions with course instructor
- Library related assignments
- Goals/objectives established for the library portion of the class (by librarian independently? with instructor?)
- Web pages/handouts (if available in advance)
- Teaching philosophy and style
- Teaching techniques or active learning strategies planned for the session
- Instructional Technology planned for class use
- Any special instructor requests regarding what to cover, etc.

During the class observation, the librarian teaching the class may want to introduce the librarian observing the class to the instructor and/or to the entire class. The observer normally sits at the back of the class so they can observe both the librarian teaching and the reaction of the students. Many institutions use a rating sheet or an observational outline on which to take notes. DeZure notes some disadvantages of using checklists, including that it could distract the observer from watching what is happening, that the categories may not fit the particular class or method, and that the checklist may imply preferred behaviors so that deficiency may be implied if they are not all demonstrated. At Penn State we chose to avoid any numerical ratings or standard list of characteristics, allowing each librarian to fully express their own styles and methodology, without feeling they needed to conform to a
particular set of questions. Dezure finds that most ratings and checklists are designed for a lecture oriented class and she encourages use of “observational protocols that do not privilege lecture as the sole or best approach and that can be adapted to other modes of instruction.” Because our teaching at Penn State often includes hands-on and other active elements, alongside demonstration and lecture components, we wanted to allow effectiveness to be observed in an overall, holistic way. The observer is encouraged to:

- Take careful notes during class -- make a record of what happened
- Keep suggestions for improvement or change separate from documentation (in margin)
- Pay attention to
  - Organization of the class session, structure and flow
  - Interaction with students during class, as well as before and after class
  - Student involvement and engagement with the material and the library instructor (participation, note taking, asking questions) or inappropriate behaviors (sleeping, checking email or other non-course material)
  - Examples, explanations, stories, demonstrations, etc. used to convey content
  - Teaching techniques, use of active learning elements and hands-on activities
  - Use of technology
  - Any issues with the physical environment that may have affected the students’ attention (could all the students hear easily? Was the classroom uncomfortably hot or cold?)

A post observation meeting should have already been scheduled in advance of the class to occur as soon after the class observation as possible so that events are clear and fresh in the minds of both the librarian and the observer. The discussion might include these elements:

- Ask how the library instructor felt the class session went
  - Ask for self-reflections on the success of the class
  - Ask where the library instructor thought she/he might improve
- Discuss flow and structure of the class, organization, and content
- Discuss active learning components, teaching methods, etc.
- Share observations you have on how engaged the students seemed from your perspective
- Tell the library instructor what you saw as their teaching strengths
- Provide suggestions for improvement – whether part of a formative or summative review, this is a particularly important component. Care should be taken to avoid a negative or critical tone here, but remain positive and encouraging to try additional strategies or approaches.

Finally, a letter is written that should include the content of the discussions and class observation. The letter is in the form of a narrative statement and avoids any numerical scores or letter ratings. The letter may address:

**Quality of Presentation:** Ability to communicate with students; organization; pacing of the session; clarity; appropriate level of interaction; use of appropriate examples.

**Degree of Library Knowledge:** Knowledge of information sources; Preparedness; Knowledge of subject matter (library and disciplinary); Effectiveness of examples.
**Usefulness / Application:** Ability of students to begin research based on this session; Questions/comments from students from hands-on portion of class; Did librarian assist students to understand importance? Why is it relevant to course and assignment, or to other information searches?

**Content:** Relevance to class assignments; appropriateness of amount of material covered; suitability of content for class; appropriateness of level of content for class; suggestions for additional/revised resources/topics

**Overall:** Overall effectiveness; particular strengths; suggestions or recommendations for growth and improvement

Other elements to consider (if noteworthy): Were any special teaching techniques used? Were they effective? Were students provided opportunities to learn actively? Was there time for practice, revision, exploration, questions? Were any Instructional Technologies used in class? If so, were they used effectively? Did students respond well to them? Could everyone hear the librarian clearly, including those in the back? Could everyone see the projection or materials clearly? Were any learning materials such as handouts or web pages provided to refresh students’ memories regarding what was covered?

Letters frequently document through a brief summary the flow of activities and content of the class, before proceeding to other types of observations and evaluative comments. Observations are often made on indicators of student involvement and engagement. The reviewer may want to comment on elements that may be beyond the librarian’s control; for example, an overheated classroom may produce sleepy or distracted students regardless of the quality of the class session, or the course instructor may have requested a certain topic be included that didn’t seem to fit with the rest of the class. Especially in course-related instruction, there are often many elements that are beyond the control of the librarian teaching the class. The observer may need to include some mention of these to provide context, or to discuss how the librarian may have handled a difficult situation. Other classroom elements that could have been resolved but were not – such as students not being able to hear well from the back of the room when a microphone provided in the room was not used, can also be included as a suggestion for an easy way to improve the classroom experience for students. Sometimes an alert that some personal mannerisms could be distracting for students also appear as suggestions for improvement. "[T]his coaching kind of formative evaluation is judgmental in the sense that feedback is given on the quality of the performance, but its purpose is supportive; it is in the service of instruction, coaching, mentoring, improvement."62

These letters are shared with the librarian, the librarian’s unit head or supervisor, and the head of Library Learning Services. The formative letters, during the first two years, are intended to be used by the librarian to improve their teaching, helping them identify areas in which they may need to spend more time planning or preparing for their classes, such as in organizing a smoother flow, integrating some active learning elements, or using more appropriate and constructive examples. After the first two years, the letters are intended to be more summative in nature, but formative comments and suggestions for improvement are still encouraged, since the primary purpose is to improve teaching, and time constraints do not allow for completely separate processes for formative and summative reviews after the second year. Each peer review takes a considerable amount of time to organize the meetings, observe the class, and write the letter. It would be irresponsible not to include suggestions for improvement in this process when the reviewer has helpful observations to make. Shulman states, "You
would not ... want to invest great time and energy in summative evaluation that would measure teaching precisely but have no positive consequences for improving its quality. We have found that overall, the letters tend to be extremely thoughtful, well written and helpful.

The letters themselves do not go into the librarian’s official human resources file, nor are they attached to the annual review or the promotion and tenure dossier. They are, however, after the second year, incorporated into both the annual review and the promotion and tenure process. This occurs through the individual who writes the librarians’ evaluative letters for these reviews. The unit head or supervisor summarizes and quotes from the letters, thereby sharing the tone and overall assessment, but not the individual details of the letters. The librarian under review does have the option of including the letters in their own supplemental file if they desire to do so, and many do. It assists them in documenting their teaching and showing their improvement, progress and growth throughout the tenure process.

In addition to the librarian and the peer reviewer, the librarian’s supervisor has an important role to play in this process. After they receive the peer review letter, the supervisor can participate in the librarian’s teaching development by encouraging the librarian to follow-up on the recommendations for improvement suggested in the letter. They might ask how the librarian may plan to address suggestions for improvement or change, and may offer advice on where to seek help. Later, they may inquire if any new techniques have been tried or if the issue has been improved. The supervisor can encourage the librarian to conduct other assessments in addition to the required peer review, such as student assessment and faculty assessments. The supervisor can encourage the librarian to reflect on their teaching and to make notes after each class, then to review those notes before the next class. Reflections can include self observations on what went well in the class, what didn’t go as smoothly, and ideas on how to improve for the next class. These reflections can also be included in a teaching portfolio to document progress and teaching improvement.

The supervisor is also an individual who can follow up from year to year. Are similar comments appearing? Has the librarian successfully made changes and incorporated the suggestions into his/her teaching? Has the librarian worked to improve his/her teaching? Can you point to examples? Using the letters as jumping off points for discussion, the supervisor can have an ongoing conversation about teaching with the librarian.

During the pilot phase (the first year) of implementation, we invited a professor in the College of Education, one known as an expert on peer review and teacher observation, to offer advice and consult with us on our process and guidelines as we had developed them for our particular needs and criteria. We discussed our goals and familiarized him with the teaching we do. We reviewed the guidelines and reviewer forms we had developed. We were pleased to receive very favorable feedback on our process and our written materials which were affirmed to be well considered and appropriate to our needs – no changes were suggested. This gave us confidence as we proceeded to implement our plan for evaluating teaching.

Valuing Teaching

Most institutions, even large research institutions, articulate good teaching as a value, but many institutions of higher education, and many libraries, do not include such a statement in their written, public documentation of their values, mission, goals, etc. As we looked at our own documents, we found little expressed emphasis on teaching. Adding some form of a statement on the value of teaching is an important place for any institution to begin when creating a system of teaching assessment. One of the
categories for all Penn State faculty dossiers is “The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.” Normally, this category includes the teaching of full credit courses, and librarians who teach credit courses document them in this category. Two other categories are shared by library faculty with all other faculty at Penn State, “The Scholarship of Research and Creative Accomplishments” and “Service and the Scholarship of Service to the University, Society, and the Profession”.

Library faculty members have an additional category unique to their positions called “The Scholarship of Librarianship”. In this category, library faculty members document all aspects of their library contributions. In this category, course related instruction, guest teaching and other invited presentations have traditionally been documented. In our official “Promotion and Tenure Criteria Guidelines” under the section on librarianship, five bullets are listed that define the overall content of the scholarship of librarianship. The third bullet states: “the ability to teach students and staff of the University, professionals in Pennsylvania and beyond, and members of the general public to identify their information needs, develop and implement search strategies, recognize and access appropriate information sources to meet those needs, and critically use those sources.”

In order to document teaching as a value, the library faculty added the following statement to the criteria:

Much of the teaching by members of the Libraries’ faculty is not credit-bearing and is documented under the Scholarship of Librarianship (third bullet, above). The University Libraries value teaching by members of Libraries’ faculty, who teach to many different audiences (undergraduate students, graduate students, university staff, general public, professionals in the field) via many media (e.g., guest lectures in resident education courses, library instruction classrooms and labs, reference desks both physical and virtual, workshops, and seminars). Teaching by members of the Libraries’ faculty is expected to be of high quality and to advance the learning experiences and learning outcomes of students and other audiences, and to contribute to the development of information literacy and an aptitude for life-long learning on the part of students and other audiences. Documentation of efforts to assess and improve one’s teaching is especially valued, as is evidence of reflective and creative use of a variety of teaching methods that advance learning.

Successes

Librarians have discovered many things during the peer review process. Getting and giving feedback on teaching from peers has created a greater awareness of teaching, and has helped to place emphasis and importance on it as an activity worth doing, and doing well. Many librarians, even some who have been teaching for years, have improved and learned new techniques. Public Services librarians are pleased to be rewarded for something they spend a good deal of time doing, and they like having it recognized alongside collection development and reference in their dossiers. Improving teaching is something librarians talk more openly about and they often seek tips and techniques from others. More experienced librarians often pick up ideas for effective teaching from the junior librarians they are reviewing, while those newer to teaching are absorbing advice and suggestions from those who have been teaching for a long time. These conversations and exchanges have added a new level of interaction, respect and collaboration among library faculty members from different departments and libraries. Some librarians have visited other campuses to conduct a peer review, extending their knowledge of the University as well as of the Libraries, while also contributing to the development of a librarian in another location. Rewarding good teaching and successful student engagement enables
those who do it to take more pride in it and confirms the worth of their efforts. The peer review program assists in fostering a culture of teaching within the Libraries and encouraging mentoring and dialog. Incorporation of information about teaching within the Libraries and about library and information research within the promotion and tenure process, beyond lists of instructional sessions and meetings, also sends a message across the University that we do teach in unique and interesting ways, and that we value our teaching.

**Conclusion**

Chism notes, “If faculty have been involved in developing the academic unit’s approach to the evaluation of teaching, obtaining consensus on the final plan should not be difficult…. a final step in arriving at a plan is to make sure that faculty understand the plan and support it.” In our case, input was sought broadly along the way. Even so, when the first draft of the guidelines for peer assessment of teaching was shared with the Library Faculty Organization and the Libraries’ administration for input and feedback, both groups raised issues and requested changes. The committee was able to address all concerns, and the final document was eventually approved for a one year pilot. After the first year, the guidelines were approved as an official library document.

Academic libraries may initially consider conducting peer review of course-related instruction as a method to document, assess, and promote the unique teaching done by faculty librarians in a way that is credible and understandable to those both inside and outside the library. But as one of several possible methods of assessing teaching, peer review of course-related or guest teaching has many advantages, and leads to more successful and thoughtful teaching by library faculty. Developing a system that works for an individual institution takes some dedicated time and effort, and faculty librarians who would use peer review of teaching must be at the forefront of the planning and development process to ensure its eventual acceptance and participation. With careful consideration of the needs and desires of the library faculty of an institution, and by including all who are interested in developing the process, librarians using peer review to evaluate teaching will have confidence in the resulting practices. Ultimately, such a process can prove successful and enhance both student engagement in the classroom and collegiality among library teachers.

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