Peer Observation of Teaching with Coaching Project
Faculty of Health Sciences
McMaster University

Introduction

With increasing emphasis on teaching effectiveness, Peer Observation of Teaching (POT) has received considerable attention in the education literature. As teachers attend to enhancing their effectiveness, they require methods for guided self-assessment and means to facilitate reflection on teaching practice that can direct their efforts. The most common methods have been student evaluations but a variety of other methods and tools exist. These may be loosely categorized into student evaluations; peer review; portfolio review (including teaching scholarship, and awards); and student outcomes including post-graduation.

This project aims to facilitate the implementation of formative low-stakes peer observation with coaching processes within the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS). The focus is on initiatives that include both a peer observation of teaching and a discussion emphasizing coaching and mutual reflection on teaching practice. The intent is to enhance the teaching practice of both observed and observing teachers.

Peer observation is attractive to teachers who are interested in further growth of their competence. Structured as a formative event, teachers perceive it as helpful and leading to improved teaching. However, there may be resistance from the faculty body, if there is a perception that there is an assessment component. These concerns can be addressed by clearly stating the intentions for the use of peer observations, and by incorporating them into a peer consultation model based on mutual benefit. By emphasizing a low stakes model of peer observation, the activity can be seen as a formative one for involved faculty members.

The FHS is diverse, and the teaching activities reflect the reality that the Schools, Departments and Programs need to design peer observation and peer coaching programs to suit their unique contexts. However, there is much to be gained from sharing ideas and experiences and having a forum to do so.

Objectives of the FHS Peer Observation of Teaching and Coaching Project

1. To facilitate Departments, Programs and Schools in designing and implementing peer observation of teaching programs.
2. To build mentoring and coaching relationships between teachers in order to enhance teaching practice.
3. To promote interprofessional collaboration towards teaching excellence.
4. To define best practices in peer teaching consultation.

Outline of FHS Peer Observation of Teaching and Coaching Program

Recognizing that each teaching and learning context has unique concerns and resources, this project focuses on providing support to Schools/Programs/Departments in the Faculty of Health Sciences in developing and launching peer observation and coaching initiatives. A toolkit has been developed to facilitate the launch of these initiatives by both large and small groups of teachers. Training sessions and materials to prepare teachers for the consultations are included, with workshops that focus on setting up a program and training observers. A new certificate program for observers is being created through the Program for Faculty Development (PFD).
Elements within the Program

1. Tool box
   - Observer-coach selection – techniques/strategies
   - Strategies for observing teaching – including small group; large group; clinical teaching sessions and other workplace teaching
   - Guides for pre and post discussions and debriefing
   - Sample instruments/guides to observation

2. Strategies
   - Observer-coach training workshops
   - Catalogue of observer-coaches
   - Consultants in POT and peer coaching

3. Tips and FAQs

4. Bibliography

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