# Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU)

## A Brief Guide to the Evaluation of Teaching and Courses

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## Centre for Teaching, Learning and Media (CTLM)

*" The effect of increases in teacher quality swamps the impact of any other educational investment, such as reductions in class size." Goldhaber, 2009*

**Why should one evaluate one's teaching and course?**

In response to the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) Teaching and Learning Policy, that requires the university to assure the quality of the teaching and learning experiences offered to students, the Teaching Development Unit introduces the Evaluation of Teaching and Courses. The process of evaluating one's teaching speaks directly to the purpose of the NMMU Teaching and Learning Policy that includes the following points as of the underpinning principles that informs the university's approach to teaching, learning and assessment[1]:

- Encourage and enable staff and students to take co-responsibility for the quality of the learning experience provided.
- Give practical effect to NMMU's strategic goal to "Create and sustain a responsive learning environment conducive to excellence in teaching and learning and fostering holistic student success"[2]

In line with the Teaching and Learning Policy the process of teaching evaluation speaks to the aim of the policy to "provide a conducive work environment where staff can function optimally and engage in on-going professional development"[3]. The policy list various ways in which the aforementioned can be demonstrated, but for the purpose of this documents the following stand out:

- Supporting and actively encouraging both and academic and professional support staff to undertake professional development opportunities that enhance their effectiveness to contribute to learning experience provided to students
- Developing strategies to encourage academics to be reflective practitioners that research their teaching and assessment practices and increasingly engage in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL).

Taking cognisance of the above-mentioned it is evident that the objective of the university and the Teaching Development Unit is to encourage academics to engage in a process which has become known as reflective practice, which entails using one's experience as an opportunity to consider both one's teaching philosophy and practice[4]. Teaching evaluation is an integral part of teaching and professional development and should be treated as an on-going and comprehensive process that is marked by careful planning and systematic implementation.

[1] NMMU Teaching and Learning Policy D/1098/09 p 2
[2] NMMU Vision 2020 Strategic Plan p31
[3] NMMU Teaching and Learning Policy D/1098/09 p 9
[4] Hammersley-Fletcher, L & Orsmond, P. (2005), "Reflecting on reflective practices within peer observation. In. *Studies in Higher Education* Vol 3, No. 2, April 2005 pp. 213-224

Teaching Evaluation is considered a critical element that influences academics' decision making on the modules and how one teaches those modules.

**What is teaching evaluation?**

Brent and Felder state that a prerequisite to improving teaching is having an effective way to evaluate it. Standard references on the subject agree that the best way to get a valid summative (or formative) evaluation of teaching is to base it on a portfolio containing assessment data from multiple sources – ratings from students, peers and administrators, self-ratings, and learning outcomes – that reflect on every aspect of teaching, including course design, classroom instruction, assessment of learning, advising and mentoring[5]. In other words, to effectively evaluate one's teaching it is imperative that one takes 'a picture' of one's teaching (or a specific aspect thereof) from as many angles or perspectives as possible for the purpose of improving the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process.

Teaching Evaluation is vital, as it speaks to reflective practice that specifically uses evaluation to focus on one's modules and how to teach them in a meaningful way to develop and enhance one's own teaching, but also student learning. Through the teaching and course evaluation process one is afforded the opportunity to reflect on feedback, which allows one to identify and develop aspects of teaching a particular module or course that need attention. It is important to understand that evaluating one's teaching does not mean we are bad teachers, in fact, it means quite the opposite, as it refines teaching skills and reflective teachers are more open to innovation[6] . Evaluating one's teaching and courses assists one in reaching one's full potential in the classroom which, promotes a culture of teaching and learning excellence and the quality of the learning experience provided at NMMU[7]. A successful evaluation generates outcomes that are valid, reliable and indicate directions and action for improvement. It is the responsibility of each individual academic to engage in evaluating teaching and courses to determine which teaching practices are more effective than others, in a specific context. Therefore, it is imperative that one takes primary responsibility for doing the evaluation.

[5] Brent, R & Felder, M. (2004) *A Protocol for Peer Review of Teaching*. Proceedings of the 2004 American Society for Engineering Education Annual Conference & Exposition. Available online: http://www.lmu.edu/Assets/Centers+$!2b+Institutes/Center+for+Teaching+Excellence/Brent+Felder+Protocol.pdf

[6] Hammersley-Fletcher, L & Orsmond, P. (2005), "Reflecting on reflective practices within peer observation. In. *Studies in Higher Education* Vol 3, No. 2, April 2005 pp. 213-224

[7] HEADS: Strategic Plan 2012-2014 p 1

**What is the purpose of the evaluation?**

There are two main purposes of teaching and courses evaluation in higher education, typically called “formative” and “summative”. Decisions about sources of evaluative data, methods of collecting information, and the importance of a formal process are centred on whether the primary purpose is summative or formative evaluation. It is however important to note that the evaluations, be it summative or formative is a developmental process in which one researches one’s teaching practice using action research and to document the scholarship of one’s teaching in a professional teaching portfolio.

**Summative evaluation** is evaluation to review results. Summative evaluation occurs for accountability to stakeholders and improvement of courses and teaching effectiveness. At the NMMU evaluation of teaching and courses is implemented as a measure of quality assurance for teaching and learning, which together with research and community engagement comprise the three main functions of higher education. Academics should be aware of when they are to be evaluated and it is recommended that a variety of methods are employed during this evaluation and that the primary focus remain developmental and that academic staff are supported in their efforts to improve their learning. The Centre of Teaching Learning and Media (CTLM) is responsible for assisting Departments and Faculties to develop teaching evaluation procedures and provides advice, support and professional development aimed at enhancing the quality of teaching across NMMU.

**Formative evaluation** is evaluation for improvement or development. Teaching and courses evaluation is to provide information and feedback to academics in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Teaching, like all other professional practices, has to be continuously and systematically examined, reflected on and improved. Evaluation assists academics to identify problems in their teaching and learning and provides ways to address these concerns. Formative evaluation is typically individualized, self-determined, and informal, but should form part of one’s reflective practice and draw information from several sources for more reliable results. When done consistently, following food practice, formative evaluations result in improvement in one’s teaching. From this perspective, early discouraging results only add lustre to later success, while demonstrating the value of evaluation for improvement and reflective practice.

Evaluation of teaching and courses is used to:

- improve teaching and learning experiences for students and academic staff;
- assist staff to engage in a scholarly review of their teaching by reflecting on unit design, delivery, student engagement, and assessment;
- promote professional development through professional conversations between colleagues who observe in their classrooms and between lecturers and HODs following formal and informal observations
- provide the individual student with an opportunity to offer constructive criticism to his/her lecturer
- provide the student body with a voice in developing and maintaining an effective lecturing and curriculum
- provide the individual academic with data that may be used in support of his/her considerations for promotion
- provide data to benchmark teaching and learning quality within and beyond the NMMU;
- provide data that may assist in making curricula decisions
- provide evidence that academics can use as indicators of teaching performance when discussing work plans with the Head of Departments; and
- provide evidence for academic staff promotion and performance management processes and teaching portfolios.

Reflecting on one's evaluations allows one to see a progression on one's teaching and allows for the dissemination of one's results for summative evaluations.

**Where does one gather data for the evaluation of teaching and courses?**

The most important consideration in teaching and courses evaluation, both for improvement purposes and for personnel decisions, is the use of multiple methods of teaching and courses evaluation involving multiple sources of data. The data obtained from each kind of evaluation, when considered together, provides one with a balanced picture of one's courses and how one teaches them. By thinking carefully about the purposes of evaluation, and by crafting multiple methods of evaluation that suit those purposes, one can devise evaluation systems that are reliable, valid, and fair. Equally important, the process of discussing and crafting evaluation systems focuses attention on the practice of good teaching and helps to create a culture in which teaching is highly valued.

Stephen Brookfield[8] states that critically reflective practitioners constantly research their own assumption about their teaching practices by seeing practice through four complementary lenses: the lens of their own reflective practice, the leans of learner's eyes, the lens of colleague perceptions, and the lens of theoretical, philosophical and research literature. Viewing what one does through these difference lenses alerts one to distorted or incomplete aspects of our assumptions that need further investigation. The four angles or lenses, which can be used to evaluate teaching and courses, are discussed below.

### 1. Self –Evaluation

Successful academics continuously evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching style. Self-reflection often occurs before feedback is gleaned from other sources. Although it also means deciding which of the feedback given by others one needs to take on board to help one develop one's teaching and courses. Self-evaluation involves critical reflection on information gathered in the process of looking at one's teaching through the other 'lenses'; it involves 'talking back' to what one's students and peers have said about one's teaching and course. The feedback on one's teaching and courses from peers and students are only really valuable if one has reflected critically on it the light of one's own experiences and beliefs.

Academics could document the feedback from others as well as their self-reflections and one's responses to all of these in a teaching portfolio. A common expression in pedagogic circles is "reflective practice." The teaching portfolio approach is widely seen as a method for fostering reflection in Higher Education context. Teaching portfolios are a means of documenting good teaching at both institutional and personal levels. In addition, building a portfolio is particularly valuable in developing as a teacher. For more information about teaching portfolio see "A brief Guide to the Development of a Teaching Portfolio" at NMMU CTLM website.

### 2. Eliciting evaluation from students

There are many different ways of accessing student perceptions of your courses and teaching. The method you choose depends on the purpose of the evaluation, nature of the feedback sought; the nature of the discipline; the level of study and the size of the class.

[8] Brookfield, S. (1998) Critically reflective practice. In *The Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions.* 178/4:197-205

**Student Feedback Questionnaires**

The Centre of Teaching Learning and Media (CTLM) has a standardised questionnaire available to academics that is administered to obtain feedback from students. CTLM is also available to assist academics in constructing a questionnaire that is tailor-made to one's needs.

Once the questionnaire has been completed one is encouraged to appoint a facilitator to administer the questionnaire rather than doing it oneself. Students are more open and honest in their responses if they are aware that the facilitator seals their responses in an envelope for return to the CTLM. The CTLM analyses the data and the results are decimated in a confidential report. Academics are encouraged to discuss the feedback with colleagues or staff within the CTLM who are available to collaborate with academics in the development of improved teaching and learning strategies.

**Other strategies for obtaining feedback from students**

There are many other educationally sound approaches for obtaining student feedback. Small Group Instructional Diagnosis (SGID) is one of the methods that have been found to be very effective. SGID is a whole class interviewing technique designed to gather consensus-based student data that enables lecturers to make informed decisions about teaching and courses. SGID's are done in small groups and facilitated by someone other than the academic. When the groups report back to the whole class, the facilitator has the opportunity to delve more deeply into important issues that are raised. It is a very effective method of eliciting feedback, which focuses on areas of specific concern to an academic.

There are also a number of more informal strategies which academics can use in their classes, which are particularly useful to inform their on-going teaching and course development in a particular module.

Academics can:

- Pose questions directly to the class, which can either be responded to orally or in writing
- Use critical learning statements: Students are asked to write down three points which, at the end of lesson/section are 'clear' and three which are 'muddy'.
- Ask students to draw a concept map showing what they have learned in a particular class or about a topic.
- Ask students at the end of class to do 'free writing', i.e. give them a topic and ask them to write, without lifting their pens, for three minutes, in response to a topic or question you have posed.

In order to create a 'culture' of evaluation students must be encouraged to see their participation in evaluating teaching and courses as part of their role as active learners. To achieve this, it helps to provide your students with feedback on what one has discovered and how the information will influence future behaviour or incite changes in one's teaching style.

Student ratings can and do provide valuable information but they cannot always tell individuals everything needed to make valid and reliable assessments of teaching effectiveness. They thus need to be used along with information from other sources to triangulate the results, much like in other forms of research.

### 3. Colleagues: Peer and teaching observations

Colleague review of teaching can play as significant a role, as does peer evaluation of research. Colleagues who have expertise in the discipline being taught and training in what to observe can provide important evaluative information through classroom visits and review of course materials and instructional contributions. While observation by colleagues should be approached with caution, if these results are to be used for summative evaluation, peer observation is an excellent method for improving teaching. It is especially effective when done reciprocally as part of a teaching circle or mentoring relationship and reflected upon in a teaching portfolio. In fact, it could be argued that observing teaching improves the teaching of the observer as much as the teaching of the observee, especially if the observer reflects on what they have observed in the classroom. Peer evaluations are normally undertaken by an academic from your department that has insight into the course material the discipline.

An alternative method of obtaining feedback on one's teaching is to approach an expert in teaching and learning, like a member of the Centre for Teaching, Learning and Media. A colleague from CTLM's feedback will focus mainly on one's teaching practice rather than course content. It is highly recommended that a peer evolution is conducted in conjunction with a CTLM teaching evaluation.

The evaluation process is enhanced when, prior to classroom visits, colleagues review the syllabus and course-related materials and discuss course goals and lecture objectives with the academic.

It is ***good practice*** for peer evaluation to be a planned and structured process, involving the separate stages. A five-step peer observation (and teaching observation) strategy is recommended below:

**Step 1:** A pre-observational meeting between academic and the peer observer to establish rapport and to set context and identify aims and learning outcomes of the process that is to be observed A document containing questions that could be used during pre-observation process is attached.

**Step 2:** The observation in which the observer records what happens in the class(es). An observation tool to record the observation is attached. It helps them focus on specific criteria essential to completing a reliable and valid observation

**Step 3:** A period of analysis in which the observer analyses what he/she has seen in relation to the terms of the pre-observational meeting and other matters arising out of the observation.

**Step 4:** A post-observation meeting in which the observer give feedback on the observation and to compare the perceptions of the observer and the observee. The observer and the observee will then discuss strategies for development/management of problems.

**Step 5:** The report, which is usually given only to the academic concerned and remains confidential will be written. The report will be sent to other people with the consent of the observee only.

It is the role of the observer

- to try to be unobtrusive in the class
- to provide prompt feedback
- to focus on providing feedback that will foster development by listening to what the academic wants him/her to observe
- to give specific feedback that is descriptive rather than evaluative
- to direct comments towards behaviour which the observee can change

## 4. Literature

Another way of obtaining insights into one's own practices is through critical reading of what academics at other universities have written about their research into the teaching of their

disciplines. There are numerous benefits for academics who engage with the literature of teaching and learning such as the South African Journal of Higher Education and Teaching in Higher Education. For example, you may discover ideas for overcoming teaching struggles, new feedback strategies or interpretive techniques, a strong vocabulary to express teaching beliefs, and/or wider social, political and cultural contexts for your teaching and some ideas on how to incorporate an engagement with scholarly literature into your teaching practice and design as well as the contextual factors that shape their teaching.

**Purpose for course evaluations**

The purposes for student evaluation of courses are:

- To furnish information for the individual academic to use in assessing his/her course content and presentation.
- To provide the individual student with an opportunity to offer constructive criticism to his/her teaching of the course.
- To provide the student body with a voice in developing and maintaining an effective Faculty and curriculum.

**Concluding Remarks**

We can conclude that reflective practice is appropriate as a means of enabling university academics to become more skilled at teaching, even when they do not see teaching as their primary field of activity. You're probably thinking that this all sounds very complicated. In truth, in most cases, appropriate use of student ratings data will result in the right decisions. However, for the minority of cases where the ratings data may be misleading or incomplete, it is critical to have other measures. In any case, a judgment is more likely to be correct if corroborated by several data sources. Indeed, few faculty members want their teaching evaluation to be based solely on student ratings.

Our university mission, in part based on our Vision 2020, states clearly that teaching is important. A department that wishes to promote effective teaching will use evaluation as an opportunity for faculty development. Meaningful and collegial peer evaluation can provide a context for valuing and supporting good teaching. The better the evaluation system, the less likely that faculty will feel they are being judged unfairly or that expectations are unclear. At the

same time, a department will be on solid ground in addressing situations of genuine poor teaching.

The CTLM is available to assist you with:

- conducting SGID's and other focus group/interviewing techniques to elicit more specific and detailed feedback from students
- setting up peer observation systems in your department
- providing teaching evaluations
- finding literature on teaching and learning
- deciding how to respond to feedback you have received building a portfolio

**For further support please phone:**

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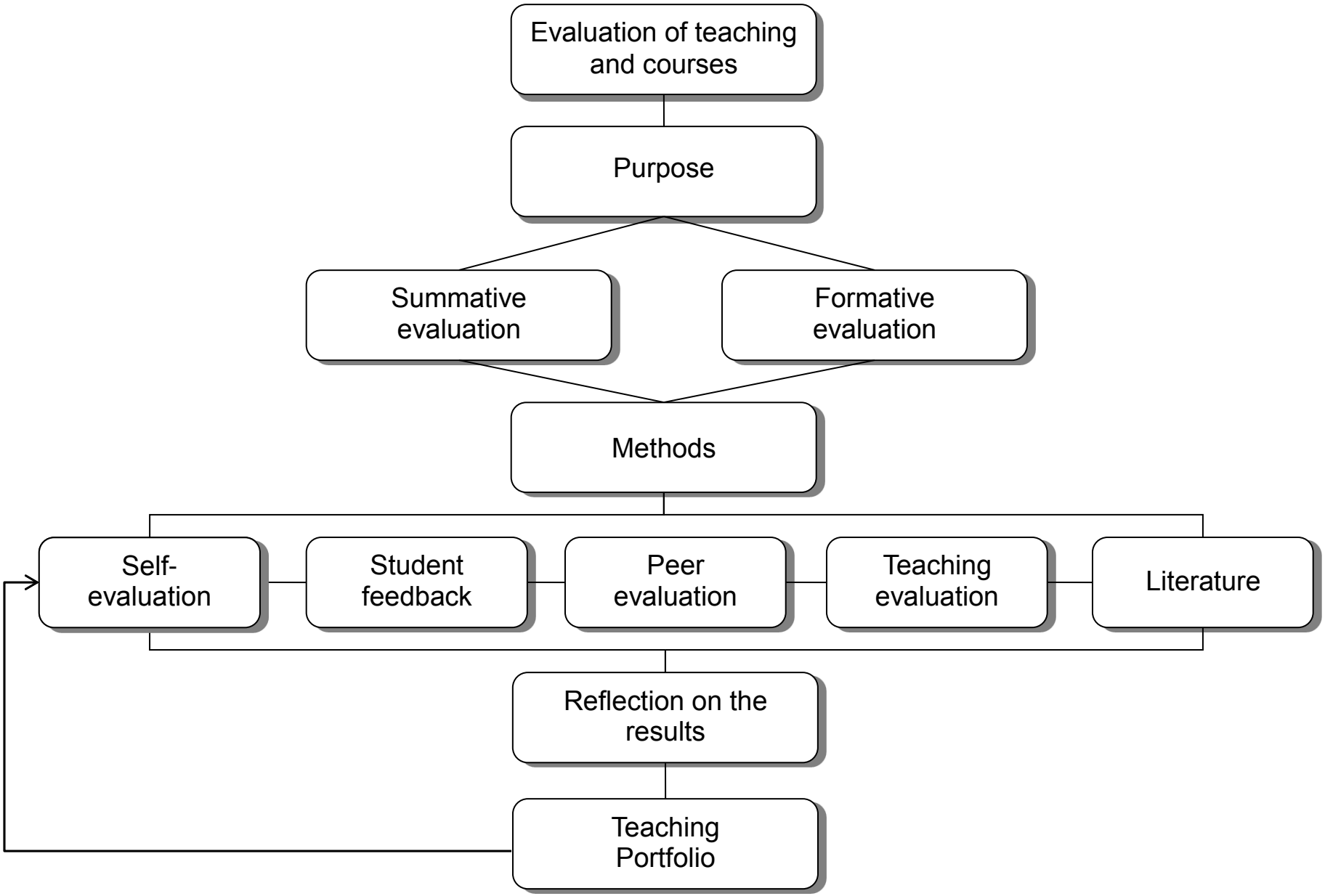
**Process for the evaluation of teaching and courses**



Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
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# CENTRE FOR TEACHING, LEARNING & MEDIA

## Peer evaluation pre-observation discussion

Lecturer _____

Position_____

Observer_____

Date of discussion_____ Course observed_____

1. What are the outcomes for the lecture?

2. What strategies, methods and techniques will you use to help the students master these outcomes?

3. How will you know that the students mastered these outcomes (how will the students show that they know and can do what you expected of them?)

4. What would you like the observer to pay special attention to?

5. What are your specific concerns about this lecture / group?

**Post-observation discussion**

Date & time:

Venue:

Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
for tomorrow

# CENTRE FOR TEACHING, LEARNING & MEDIA

## Peer Teaching Observation

Lecturer observed_____

Position_____

Date of observation_____ Course observed_____

Rating scale (1 = very poor, 2 = weak, 3 = average, 4 = good, 5 = excellent)

## ORGANIZATION

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Introduction captured attention | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 (Excellent) |
| Introduction stated organization of lecture | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Outcomes were clearly communicated | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Effective transitions (clear summaries) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Concluded by summarizing main ideas | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Reviewed by connecting to previous classes | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Previewed by connecting to future classes | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Appropriate strategies & methods were used | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Clear information on learning resources | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

## INTERACTION

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lecturer questions at different levels | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Sufficient wait time provided | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Students asked questions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Lecturer feedback was informative | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Lecturer incorporated student responses | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Good rapport with students | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Learner diversity was accommodated | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

## VERBAL/NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Articulation and pronunciation clear | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Absence of verbalized pauses (er, ah, etc.) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Accent was not distracting | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Effective voice quality | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Volume sufficient to be heard | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Rate of delivery was appropriate | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Effective body movement and gestures | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Eye contact with students | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Confident & enthusiastic | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

## USE OF MEDIA

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teaching material content clear & well organized | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Visual aids can be easily read | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Computerized instruction effective | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

## STRENGTHS:

(e.g. use of comparisons & contrasts, positive feedback, opportunity provided for student questions and active participation)

## COMMENTS & SUGGESTIONS:

## OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS RATING

1 2 3 4 5
(Excellent)

Date of observation _____

Observer name & signature_____

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# CENTRE FOR TEACHING, LEARNING & MEDIA

## Teaching evaluation post-observation discussion

Lecturer _____

Position_____

Observer_____

Date of discussion_____ Course observed_____

1. What do you think worked well in this lecture?

2. Do you think you accomplished the outcomes you set for this lecture (what can the students do now that they could not do before the lecture?) How do you know this?

3. What would you do differently if you were to repeat this lecture? Why?

4. What support do you require to further develop your teaching practice?