

Peer Dialogue of Teaching in the Department of History

University policy requires all Departments to have a policy on peer dialogue on teaching and the Department of History agreed the following guidelines in 2018. The **peer dialogue** of teaching may include a teaching observation but may also use other material to provide a richer context or to inform a particular conversation on teaching (for example on diversifying assessment or on providing a more inclusive curriculum). Research has shown that peer dialogue is a more collegial method and leads to better sharing of practices than teaching observations alone. The policy is designed to improve collegiality and showcase best practice in teaching. Those acting as reviewees observed should have agency and be able to shape the process.

All reviewers should adopt the following principles:

- **Integrity.** Peer review works best when reviewers have commitments to integrity, fairmindedness, privacy, and understanding the reasoning behind the teaching choices of the person under review.
- **Trust.** Peer reviewers work collaboratively with the staff under review.
- **Mentoring.** The peer review process should offer feedback, advice and support on developing good practice.
- **Feeding Forward.** The peer reviewers will feed forward to the Department examples of good practice to aid in the development of all teachers.

Why peer dialogue?

1. As with peer review of research it is an important way of receiving expert feedback on a key part of our scholarly practice.
2. Helps us create a community of practice with shared objectives regarding our teaching.
3. Encourages collegiality, support and conversations about teaching practices.
4. Makes us less reliant solely on student evaluations as an assessment of our teaching practice. Students don't always provide the best evaluations of teaching, although it is important their voice is heard and responded to.
5. Shares good practice across the department and nurtures teaching improvement and enhancement.

APP TE Requirements

LDC have confirmed that this process/form may be used in place of the mentor's review of APP TE candidates as an exception for this Department only.

Timing

Each year all staff will either be reviewers or reviewees. The peer dialogue process will take place in term 2 (after mid-year student evaluations). The reviewee will be able to choose their observer (from a list to help equalise workload) and the particular class or activity they would feedback on. There will then be a conversation between the reviewer and reviewee which will lead to areas of best practice being fed forward to help the Department plan teaching enhancement activities and showcase areas of innovation and excellence.

What might be discussed in the wider conversation and why?

1. Context: numbers of students; level of module; learning objectives; characteristics of learners; characteristics of teacher. This is to take account of the diversity of the lecture or seminar group, whether it is a core/optional module, the teacher's approach and previous experience and other contextual information which might be helpful.
2. Peer observation: to cover content knowledge; class organisation; teaching methods; presentation; teacher-student interaction; student engagement; supporting materials; formative and summative assessment practices. This provides feedback on the particular class observed. See the reflective questions on the form.
3. Evidence of student learning: for example sample assessments; feedback; grade overviews. This will help highlight areas of assessment and feedback strategies that engage students; that produce good outcomes; and that support diverse learners.
4. Student evaluations and responses to those. This will help conversations on the student voice/engagement.

Reporting

Peer reviewers/reviewees will complete a report by the end of the Spring Term (which will remain confidential unless the reviewer wishes to use the report for promotion or other purposes). The recommendations/feed forward to the Department and examples of best practice will be shared in the summer term (see examples in report from 2018-19 below).

Peer to Peer Classroom Observation Form

*(This form is **confidential** to the observer/observed unless both agree to share information, for example in cases where accreditation of teaching is required, best practice identified for dissemination or evidence is needed for promotion. A pre-observation will have taken place to discuss the objectives of the class and particular areas where feedback might be helpful)*

Observer: _____ Teacher Observed: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____ Module: _____

Learning Objectives: What are the learning objectives for the class and are they appropriate for the level of module? Are the learning objectives evident to the students?

Teaching Practice: What teaching practices/methods of engagement are observed and how effective are these? Examples might include source analysis, student-led discussions; debates; presentations; small group work and many others.

Student Engagement: How are students engaging with the teaching?

Teacher Observed Reflection: What went well throughout the lesson? What would you do differently next time?

Observer Reflection: In what ways has the lesson you've observed impacted your thinking and/or future classroom practices?

Peer Dialogue of Teaching Report

(The first section of this report is confidential and aims to provide a template for a peer to peer conversation about teaching. However, if both parties agree the evidence collected may be used for purposes such as accreditation of teaching, promotion or probation.)

Evidence Evaluated

Module and Cohort Information: numbers of students; level of module; learning objectives; characteristics of learners; characteristics of teacher; module website/VLE

Peer to Peer Classroom Observation Form

Evidence of Student Learning (sample assessments, feedback, grade profiles)

Student Evaluations and Responses

Section 1: Report on Module (questions are for guidance)

Design and structure

Are the aims and rationale of the module explicit?

What is the mix of learning modes?

How are learners supported?

Other comments?

Assessment

Are the assessment tasks and criteria clear?

Are there formative assessment exercises?

Is there a mixture of formats; are self, peer or group assessment used?

How does the student receive feedback?

Other comments?

Evaluation

How is the module evaluated?

What do students regard as the best features of the module?

What changes do students propose?

What changes have been made in response to student evaluations?

Other comments?

Section 2: This section of the report will go forward to the Department to enable best practice to be shared and showcased and any common issues discussed more widely.

Summary

In what ways does the module align with Dept/University teaching standards and the QAA subject benchmark statement?

Areas of good practice, other comments to feed forward to the Department

Name and signature of module reviewer:

Name and signature of module teacher:

Date:

Peer Review of Teaching Report 2018-19

This year peer review of teaching took place across the Department with all staff either acting as reviewers or reviewees. 20 forms were returned highlighting areas of best practice which can be shared.

Team Taught Teaching

This Special Subject module is delivered by three academics, who have previously worked together as part of a research team. Their areas of specialisation have common elements but are diverse enough to enable a rich and rewarding collaboration: this collaboration was first established in a research environment and is now transported to a seminar setting. This is a brilliant example of collaborative research leading to a rewarding collaborative teaching experience. The three tutors often sat in each other's sessions: this helps when drawing comparisons and reinforcing links between topics. Tutors offered help with dissertations based on their specific area of specialisation.

Diversity of Assessment

A day-long (10am-3pm) student conference was organised in week 7 of Term II. Students presented papers on their long essays or dissertations (in lieu of a formative essay). They found this experience very useful: students benefitted from peer-to-peer feedback, and engaged critically with each other's presentations. Written feedback was also given.

To help students develop a variety of skills primary sources were incorporated throughout (for each week two primary source excerpts were set, of which the students chose one, alongside two secondary source readings) as well as an element of oral presentation: each week two students introduced one of the core readings and proposed areas of discussion. To diversify assessments a 1000 word primary source analysis and digital group project were introduced. The latter helps foster collaborative skills and engage students with different media and forms of communicating historical knowledge, in this case through a blog or videocast. The groups also presented their project to their peers in a 15 minute group presentation followed by a Q&A in a separate workshop session. The group projects were very successful in pooling together creative and intellectual skills and fostering a sense of cohort and on the whole produced more interesting and engaged work when compared to the standard essay.

Support for Employment/Further Study

The module has clearly inspired students' career choices. One of the students is converting to medicine. A couple of students have applied for MA programmes in History of Medicine.

Lectures

Lectures begin by outlining clear research goals for the day and connect the material to the previous lecture. The lecture is supplemented with a printed handout which all students seem to find helpful (they were writing notes on the paper and referring to it in class) and with a PowerPoint which introduces key points and examples but never takes over the lecturer's discourse.

Link to seminar: The tutor identified an issue from the lecture as an 'umbrella question' ('genetics as a political philosophy') at the start of the seminar and came back to this question at the very end, discussing the social and political applications/implications of genetics, and highlighting the variety of political approaches very clearly. He also made sure to go back to the points made in the lecture throughout the seminar. These approaches made the group work even more effective by giving a clear context to the concepts that the students were working on. Examples from their seminar reading were brought up to highlight and clarify links. There is a clear holistic approach with useful and clear links made between the lecture, the seminar and all the background reading.

Group Work

Group work: key concepts were identified, asking students to work in groups to define each concept in one sentence. The tutor engaged with one of the groups actively, giving all the groups help by answering questions, offering tips and direction. As the students presented their findings, the tutor encouraged them work out the links between the different theories, highlighting their evolution. This exercise showed that the students had retained information from the lecture, as well as being able to recall and create links with relevant prior knowledge.

Management of the (large) group was inspiring: she had allocated them prior to the seminar to specific groups, reading materials related to different parts of the world. Instead of putting the groups together in a homogenous manner, she created groups that had representatives from each area of reading. This worked well.

Seminar Practices

Particularly good use of the whiteboard was made in this session to map, shape and engage with the students' contributions as seminar discussions took place. Starting from the single point of the lecture/seminar topic, he was able to generate key themes and questions for discussion from each student's report on the readings he or she had selected for close analysis in the previous week. This ensured that all contributions were acknowledged and valued, but also that they left a visible trace so that students and tutor could refer back to them and draw further connections between identified themes. I was also very impressed by the ways in which he supported his students as they spontaneously moved beyond the readings to explore questions of gender and sexuality in a wider global context. Importantly, he created the space for this discussion to emerge via questions about e.g. LGBT history month and other contemporary phenomena, and by asking students to consider whether contemporary categories could usefully be projected back into the past, or were analytically suspect. This allowed the students to draw organic conclusions about the limitations of a Eurocentric reading list (and wider historiography), some of which were very sophisticated.

Great use was made of a timeline constructed by the students (with no previous preparation) which was then used to frame the seminar discussion. The tutor referred back to the timeline at several points during discussions of the primary sources and also linked to students' own dissertation/long essay research.

This was a model seminar - the students helped decide the curriculum, there are well chosen sources, and the questions are well planned and at an appropriate level. There is also an online review after the seminar. The students had prepared and took part in the discussion, and this reached a high standard. The students also listened to each other, and felt at ease in the seminar.

The review and self-review on moodle was interesting, not least where students sometimes underrated their own performance.

If there was little response on a wider question, the tutor told the students to 'talk to the person sitting next to you'. They all did so, immediately, and with some animation, and were then asked to report back. This structure will help to progress the seminar from exchanges between the tutor and individual students towards broader interchanges between the students themselves.

This module promotes attention to diversity and complexity, and encourages students to take a more global view of these phenomena; I witness this working effectively during my observation of a debate about the Civil Service Examinations in Chinese history. Students were asked to actively compare this system with the British one, taking historical and contemporary events into account; in the in-class debate, issues about social inclusion, barriers to equality and ways to address those barriers emerged directly from the students' participation. Similarly the format and way it is taught in seminar encouraged the students themselves to take charge of formulating cogent and focused questions about the past, and evaluating their own responses to those questions critically. Students were also actively supported to develop oral skills in argument, and intellectual independence.

Structure of debate:

Preparation: To address the larger size of seminar groups across the Department, this format divides the group into three teams. All students are given the debate's proposition in advance of the seminar, by email, which serves as a reminder and prompt to complete the reading, with the debate topic in mind. On arrival, and after a short introductory statement from the tutor about the day's topic and its relationship to the debate proposition, the students are divided into teams. The teams are then given a period of c. ten minutes to discuss and structure their arguments (for the debating teams) and to determine the criteria by which the debate will be judged (the judging team, with support from the instructor).

1. **Affirmative team:** All members of the team must speak, presenting a point in the team's agreed argument. Speakers 1, 2, 3... each present for no more than 2 minutes each – measured by a visible clock brought by the instructor; the team together offers rebuttal, participates in open debate, and offer closing comments.

2. **Opposing team:** All members of the team must speak, presenting a point in the team's agreed argument, ideally supported from the readings. Speakers 1, 2, 3... each present for no more than 2 minutes each– measured by a visible clock brought by the instructor; the team together offers rebuttal, participates in open debate, and offer closing comments.

3 **Judging team:** The remaining students together:

a) define three to five criteria (two or three words) for judging the system or arguments under consideration ('we need to look into') and prepare to explain each criterion 1-2 minutes;

b) during the debate, develop one question for each team (related to their arguments);

c) deliberate on performance of the two teams according to the five criteria—which team wins in the each category?

They are told NOT to comment on overall wins, and the whole group is assured that this does not matter. They are responsible for listening carefully and presenting their deliberation in detail.

Stages:

Initial preparation (10 min); Instructor listens in to each group and offers guidance that encourages students to use the readings and address key points. The format allows the instructor to support the judging team in developing criteria (a challenging task); the debating groups on the overall argument; and support individual students one-to-one as they develop their individual propositions.

Presentation of the Criteria The judging team list and very briefly explain the criteria they have developed for judging the arguments. As few as three criteria can be sufficient.

Presentation of individual affirmative and oppositional propositions – each proposition is timed; each point is summarised by the judges/instructor, before moving to the next point, ensuring that audience students are actively engaging with the debate.

Preparation for rebuttals (5-10 mins); again, instructor listens in, offering guidance on what their strongest argumentative points were, and draws attention to potential rebuttal points that will bring in aspects of the readings or wider historical analyses, ensuring that key historical points are made. The Judging group considers the fit between debating teams' arguments and their criteria, and composes questions for each team.

Rebuttals and Judges' questions (debating teams are given a short period to consider their responses to the questions). Note that sometimes the debate takes off naturally at this stage, and there is no need to develop 'official' questions to keep discussion moving.

Open debate: all participate.

Assessment on criteria by the Judging team.

NB. IF the class size is small, Instructor can fulfil the Judging team's role.