



Teaching Observation Partners (TOPs)

“Ubuntu – I am because we are.”

Teaching Observation Partners (TOPs) aims to help instructors improve their teaching skills and to foster our learning community through peer-to-peer classroom observations. Receiving feedback on teaching is an important component of professional development. It helps instructors identify areas of growth and increase their confidence in areas in which they already excel. Observing other’s teaching and providing constructive feedback will also help instructors develop as a teacher.

Below are the steps given to guide the peer classroom observation process:

Step 1. Finding a Teaching Observation Partner (TOPs): Please fill out this brief [form](#) to indicate your upcoming class schedule. Subsequently, a spreadsheet will be shared with all instructors requesting observations to help them partner on observing each other’s class. In order to obtain differing perspectives, the Teaching Academy recommends instructors receive a minimum of two observations from an observer. The observer does not need to be within the same or related discipline of the instructor.

Step 2. Conducting a Classroom Observation: TOPs is a real-time observation tool and reflection form that is used to document student and teacher behavior. The TOPs ‘2 – Do during class’ tab provides calculations of time spent on the activities performed. The TOPs ‘3 – Do immediately after class’ is used to provide a reflective and descriptive feedback immediately after the observation. Both tabs include examples to help demonstrate how to record the observations and reflective feedback.

Step 3. Providing feedback! If possible, the instructor and observer should schedule a time after class to debrief. The completed TOPs workbook should be emailed to the instructor and also to teachingacademy@jhu.edu. If notes were hand written, the observer can either scan or take a photo of the notes to share them electronically.

Please name your file: TOPs_teacherlastname_observerlastname_MMDDYY (of the observation).

Tips for the instructor

- Send a copy of the course syllabus to the observer before the scheduled appointment, but ideally at least one-week before the observation. Share directions for parking, classroom location and directions to the building. This email serves as a helpful reminder as well.
- Most students are curious about the presence of a visitor in the classroom. It is good form to introduce the observer using their name and to explain the purpose for their visit. Most students are typically impressed to learn that their instructor is participating in a program to help improve their teaching skills.
- Keep in mind that it is a good idea to avoid classes in which there is little interaction between the instructor and the students (e.g., a test day).

Tips for the observer

- Resist the urge to participate in the class activities. Focus on observing to provide the instructor feedback.
- Class times vary considerably. Observing an entire class session from start to end offers the best and least disruptive experience for the instructor and the students. If scheduling conflicts prevent observing the entire class, discuss with the instructor the least disruptive means of entering/leaving the class.
- Plan to arrive 10 minutes early to check in with the instructor and be introduced at the beginning of the class.
- Please see the TOPs workbook for specific directions on how to conduct the classroom observations ('Instructions' tab). Review the workbook prior to class and contact the Teaching Academy with any questions about how to use the tool to document classroom activities and provide qualitative feedback.
- If possible, arrange to meet with the instructor(s) in person to provide feedback. This is an opportunity to provide more detail and give context to the written feedback and to learn from each other! Consider meeting in the library, a café or comfortable location. The Teaching Academy can provide a coffee/tea coupon to the Brody Daily Grind or a \$5.00 Starbucks gift card. Email teachingacademy@jhu.edu to request one!
- Finally, please make sure that the [sign-up form](#) is updated with the observation information. Send electronic copies of the completed observation workbook to teachingacademy@jhu.edu. We will use the data collected to help us validate and improve the tool. Data will not be used for any formal evaluation of the individual instructor and will be kept completely confidential.

Questions?

teachingacademy@jhu.edu.