Albright College Professional Council

Peer to Peer Professional Development Opportunities

The Professional Council is happy to offer two faculty development programs to both full-time and part-time faculty in support of excellence in teaching and scholarship. These programs are designed to provide feedback to faculty at all career stages through scholarship circles and peer teaching consultation.

The “Teaching Coach” peer mentoring program pairs two individuals to work on your own goals in terms of improving teaching. The “Scholarship Circle” program supports the development of your scholarship through feedback and opportunities for exchange and presentation. The goals and duration of participation in both programs are based on a discussion by participants.

Teaching Coaches

The program consists of voluntary, confidential coaching with fellow faculty members, either through peer classroom observation, review of teaching materials, or a combination of both. Coaching by peers can assist both new and experienced faculty to expand and improve their range of classroom skills.

Full-time faculty members who are interested in the possibility of serving as a teaching coach should contact their Professional Council representative or the Dean of Adult and Professional Studies, as appropriate. You may indicate specific expertise that you believe would be helpful to others if you wish.

Overview

You and your coach will decide together what kind of consultation would be most useful, the kind of feedback you expect, and whether there will be any record of the coach’s observations and subsequent discussion with you. The consultation process is meant to be formative, not summative, i.e., not to “grade” your teaching but to assist your self-reflection as a teacher and encourage you to make changes or try new approaches, as you deem appropriate. Consultations should be collaborative and confidential. The consultation process is not intended to produce a personnel evaluation – the sole audience is the instructor, unless the instructor chooses to share it.

A faculty member interested in either classroom observation or review of instructional materials should complete the Coach Request Form [link]. Based upon this Request Form, a coach will contact you to confirm your request and discuss details about the process. The Form will ask if you have preferences about your coach. Whatever kind of consultation you pursue, the process will begin with a planning meeting to discuss your goals and end with a debriefing in which your consulting colleague reviews with you his or her impressions.
Below you will find more detail on the two services available through the coaching program: (1) peer review of instructional materials and practices and (2) peer classroom observation. In either case, if you prefer someone who teaches in your discipline or division, make that preference clear on your Coach Request Form.

**Review of Instructional Materials and Non-Classroom Practices**

You may use the Request Form to ask a colleague to advise on any of the variety of materials and practices that are key parts of your teaching life, for example:

- developing syllabi
- creating effective course structure
- incorporating alternative pedagogies
- creating assignments and exams
- grading and feedback on student work
- creating culminating (“capstone”) assignments
- aligning class goals and assessments

Or you may have other targets in mind for developing your teaching. During your preliminary discussion, you and your teaching coach should clarify exactly what your targets are and what is mutually expected in terms of comment and written record. These expectations will be recorded on a Coaches Notes form that will also be used to record the coach’s observations. After the agreed-upon review is complete, you will meet so that your coach can discuss with you the materials and strategies that were the subject of the consultation. If requested, the coach will submit to you a confidential written summary.

**Classroom Observation**

In this program, another faculty member attends one or more of your class sessions, records his or her observations of your teaching practices, and later meets with you to discuss those observations. We recommend two observation sessions to provide more representative information, but this is not required.

Peer observation affords an instructor a specific, intentional venue for discussing one or more teaching-related topics with a supportive colleague. This consultation provides:

- feedback from an objective observer regarding such things as class organization and pace, lecturing style, opportunities for active learning, handling class discussions, variety of presentation style or activities, particular behaviors or habits, explanatory techniques, use of visuals or technology, or other areas that are of interest or concern to the instructor or that appear salient to the coach.
- a concrete, experiential context for understanding other student feedback you may have received, such as regular course evaluation data.

In addition, the observer is likely to gain as well through insight into his or her own teaching practices by observing how others practice their craft of teaching.

The process will typically work as follows. Based upon your Request Form, a coach will contact you to confirm your request and the date/time of the intended class. Well before
the class, you will confer with your colleague to identify your goals for the students in that class session, for the observation, and for the subsequent consultation, including your expectations about any written record of the experience. Your post-observation discussion should be scheduled at this initial meeting. These mutually agreed goals will be recorded on a Coaching Planning form. After the observation, your coach will provide you with written comments.

It is recommended that, if time permits, there be a brief discussion immediately after the class, but the formal de-briefing session will allow you and the coach a better chance to reflect before discussing the observed class, your mutual observations, and the possible implications for your future teaching.

Generally class observations are collaboratively planned and scheduled, but you do have the option of requesting one or more “surprise” visits. Also, if the coach is willing, you may request to attend one of his or her classes in order to see certain practices implemented.

Albright’s Faculty Peer to Peer Professional Development Program benefits and is adapted from peer mentoring websites from other institutions, such as East Carolina University, New York University, Northern Illinois University, University of Michigan, University of Washington, Virginia Tech, Virginia Commonwealth University
**Teaching Coaches Planning Form**

This form records the mutual planning and expectations of the instructor and the teaching coach. It is important that the instructor review it to ensure his or her goals for the consultation are fully reflected.

Requesting Instructor: ________________________________

Coach: ________________________________

**Purpose of Consultation:**

___ Classroom observation - Time and Place of observation:

______________________________________________

___ Review of materials/non-classroom practices - Date materials due to mentor for review:

________

**Time and Place for Follow-Up Consultation:**

______________________________________________

**PRE-OBSERVATION MEETING**

Date held: ____________________________

A. What are the instructor’s specific goals for the class being observed or the teaching materials or strategies being reviewed?

B. The instructor requests the observer to pay particular attention to the following:
**Albright College Faculty Teaching Coaches Program**

*Guidelines for Coach Observations*

Thank you for volunteering to provide consultation to your faculty colleagues. As you know, consultation by peers can assist both new and experienced faculty in expanding and improving their range of classroom skills. The beneficiaries are not only both them and our students, but also perhaps you, as you gain insight into their and your own teaching practices through the consultation process.

Please refer to the overview of the *Albright College Faculty Teaching Coaches Program* for a description of the program and its expectations. The program consists of voluntary, confidential, formative consultation with faculty peers, either through peer classroom observation, review of teaching materials, or a combination of both. Following is the basic structure to be followed for consultations.

1. **Pre-Observation Meeting:** The purpose of this meeting is for the instructor and coach to share information that helps both of you prepare for whatever type of consultation is to follow. The results of this meeting should be recorded on the *Teaching Coaches Planning* form [link]. As that form says, be sure that the instructor has a chance to review and confirm the arrangements and expectations arrived at, to ensure the goals of the consultation are being fully met.

   Information exchanged during this preparatory meeting should include the purpose of the consultation and the specific goals the instructor hopes to meet through it. If it is a class observation, the instructor should provide course information (including the syllabus) and class activities scheduled for the day(s) of the observation, and the two of you should agree on what you will do as the observer. Ask the instructor to tell you about the course and make sure you get a very clear sense of the instructor’s specific goals for both the class period and for the observation. The observation follow-up discussion should be scheduled at this time and recorded on the form. Note that, for classroom observations, two observations are recommended but not required.

2. **Class Observations:** You may use whatever approach you prefer, but you will be provided with a vehicles with which to record your impressions of the class, *Classroom Observation Worksheets* [link] that includes rubrics or topics for you to consider as you observe a colleague’s teaching. Not all items will be relevant; and it is intended not as a worksheet, not a scorecard. You should prepare a final written memo for the instructor summarizing your impressions. This should be done as soon as is practical after the class to improve your detailed recall of the observation.

   When you do the classroom observation, try to come early. Sit and take notes unobtrusively. Use the observation forms provided. Don’t try to record everything that goes on in the classroom. Selectively observe and record, guided by instructor’s explicit interests. However, you need not feel prohibited from noting things you think important
that were not part of the initial request. Soon after observing the class, if not immediately, review your notes to make sure you can recall specifics to tell the instructor.

3. **Class Observation Follow Up:** You and the instructor can devise whatever post-observational discussion you think best, but it is recommended that two meetings be held, the first a very brief preliminary meeting immediately after class, if your schedules permit. At this time, determine if the instructor felt the class was typical and if he or she has any immediate concerns to relay to you. Perhaps open by asking for the instructor’s response to his or her own class before you speak: “How did you think it went?” This contact should be short and minimal – instructors may need significant time to unwind from a class, and you will have had no opportunity to reflect on what you’ve observed.

A second, more formal meeting should already have been scheduled for later. At that time you would provide the instructor with your memo summarizing the consultation and your suggestions. Review the observation comments and plan any further follow-up desired by the instructor. Start your feedback with honest descriptions of things you think worked well in the class. It is important for the instructor to know what works in order to reinforce strengths. Remember that this debriefing is a discussion, not a lecture. Also, avoid information overload; focus on what the instructor requested before the observation. See below for other suggestions about giving feedback.

4. **Non-Classroom Consultations:** A colleague may want advice on developing effective syllabi, creating better assignments or exams, deciding a new approach to grading and feedback on student work, or on other aspects of their teaching. If the instructor has asked you to review instructional materials or advise on strategies for various aspects of his or her teaching life, make sure both sides are clear on what documents or meetings are needed in order to accomplish this, and set firm deadlines. This will protect your time and will keep the process from extending unreasonably. You should be willing, if asked, to provide a brief report summarizing your thoughts and opinions.

5. **Giving Feedback to Your Colleagues:** Following are some further suggestions about offering your feedback constructively.
   - Remember that those being observed may feel themselves to be in a somewhat vulnerable position, even though this is a voluntary exercise.
   - Try to be as specific as possible in your comments rather than general.
   - Be descriptive rather than evaluative.
   - Make sure feedback and suggestions refer to something the person has control over.
   - Make sure that the tone and intent of your feedback is helpful, not punitive – is constructive and not purely fault-finding.
   - Take care not to assert or imply in some way that you are the standard for good teaching practice. There are many ways to teach well – by trying to adopt the instructor’s perspective you will be fairer and may even learn something.
Consciously try to offer positive feedback to balance corrective feedback, although offering the latter may be easier to do. Evidence of your good will can take the sting out of constructive criticism and make it more likely to be heard.
Albright College Professional Council

Scholarship Circles Program

Purpose: To encourage faculty scholarship and creative development through informal peer mentoring in all disciplines based on voluntary faculty participation. Examples of scholarship circle activities would include informal presentations or updates on research, circulating drafts of research proposals, papers or grant applications for feedback or coordinating a visit of an outside speaker of interest to the group.

Activities – The format of each circle is determined by circle members. The aims of the program are to promote scholarship and creative development. Recommended activities include regular presentations of work in progress or completed, inviting guest speakers or service providers, sponsoring or hosting events on campus and regular review of one another’s scholarly work. It’s hoped that a scholarship circle would lead to collaboration and/or public presentation of the work of the scholars.

Themes – The themes of scholarship circles will be selected by faculty. Themes can be discipline specific (Social Science, Natural Science), topic specific (Asia, Health, Development) or both.

Process:

Solicitation – An email will be circulated on the Faculty list-serve and mentioned at a faculty meeting describing the program and inviting faculty to propose a faculty circle topic. This will give us an initial idea of interest. Once lists of faculty conveners and topics have been determined, the PC will announce a list of scholarship circles available in 2012-13 and their first meeting time and location. Conveners are encouraged to invite faculty members to join their circle.

Participation – All teaching faculty are invited to join in the circle. Advanced undergraduates or other members of the campus community engaged in scholarship in the field may be invited but only after receiving approval by a majority of the faculty members in the circle. The minimum or maximum size of a circle is determined by faculty in the group. While there is no established minimum or number of meeting times, circles must fulfill some requirements to count as a service activity for the convener.

Counting as Service – The faculty convener can consider their faculty circle as one of their service requirements if the circle meets the following requirements:

- Minimum number of participants: 6
- Minimum number of meetings per year: 6
- Provides at least 1 event or activity that is open to the broad campus community per year. Examples: a lecture, an invited speaker, an awareness event (all potentially could be experience events)

Support: The Professional Council will keep a list of scholarship circles and conveners. They will communicate this list to new faculty members and encourage their participation. Circle members are encouraged to ask for Experience Event or PC funds within the grant guidelines as needed to support the activities of their circles.