Structuration and Genre: Revising Teaching Observations to Reflect Program Values

Adrienne Jankens and Joe Torok

In this article, we describe the process of revising our writing program's teaching observation forms and processes over the last several years, drawing from descriptions of best practices in conducting teaching observations in writing programs (Comer; Jackson). We analyze the teaching observation form as it functions in a structurational nexus to both manage participants' conversations about teaching and respond to the tensions inherent in the process (Giddens; Miller et al.). Our argument is two-fold: 1) while a responsive and reciprocal praxis for a teacher observation process may begin with good intentions surfaced through informal conversations, teaching circles, and committee meetings, it is sustainably cultivated through the intentional design of the overall process, particularly through its tangible artifacts such as email correspondence and the observation form; and 2) the teaching observation form, as an object playing a pivotal role in a series of social interactions, is a key example of a writing program genre that has the potential to both demonstrate program values and frame responsible rhetorical interactions between program personnel.

> Please do forgive if this is out of order or not according to protocol, but I am frustrated and confused, and I could really use some guidance. I know that I am supposed to meet with my reviewer, but I really do not want to unless you feel it would do any good or be necessary. [They have] already been to my class twice, then drilled me with questions in between classes, and I am ready to be done with this one.
>
> —Email to Adrienne from a recently observed instructor

The teaching observation process and its related documents, though ubiquitous in teachers' professional lives, are nevertheless often markers of tension. In our composition program, which is embedded in an English department at an urban research university, the various iterations of the form completed by observers have supported both formative and summative observations of graduate teaching assistants (GTAs). In an evaluative function, the form works in tandem with the syllabus-collection process conducted program-wide each term, documenting whether and how instructors carry

out required tasks. Instructors who do not meet expectations for teaching their assigned course are paired with faculty mentors for instructional support, further conversation, and more observation. In a formative capacity, the documents provide direction for curriculum development and workshop planning, models for teacher-to-teacher conversations, a vocabulary for constructive dialogue, and evidence of performance for teaching portfolios. However, while program personnel agree on the larger function and value of the teaching observation process, we have often seen short-term challenges emerge from instructors' initial review of completed forms, from observers' engagement with the form, and even from participants' attempts to schedule observations. These tensions are the impetus for the revision work we describe in this article.

Our department primarily funds PhD students, and sometimes MA students, from across English studies concentrations. These GTAs teach approximately one fourth of general education composition sections. The courses they teach (basic writing, introductory college writing, or intermediate college writing) attend to learning outcomes that include reading, writing, research, and reflection; this last outcome is an important correlate with our graduate-level teaching practicum learning outcomes. We, a tenure-track assistant professor (Adrienne) and an associate professor of teaching (Joe), previously collaborated for several years on the program's mentoring committee, strategizing mentoring support for new and experienced GTAs alongside and after their work in the practicum. In 2015, revised departmental by-laws required a formal teaching observation in each year of a GTA's funding (and informal observations for new GTAs in their first semester), necessitating more than ad hoc administration for the more than forty observations that would take place annually. In a service role, Adrienne coordinated non-tenure-track faculty's observations of GTAs (and occasionally, new part-time faculty). These faculty typically complete four observations per year each on top of their other committee-focused service to the program and department. As we describe below, the observation process has included formal scheduling emails, an invitation to a pre-observation conversation, a classroom visit (or arrangement for online course access), completion of the form, the teacher's review of the completed form, and a post-observation discussion in which both observer and teacher sign off on the form before submitting it to the director of composition. It is a multi-step process that requires considerable time across a semester.

With these teaching assignments and observation processes in place, teacher development has become an explicit focus of our program's work, important for all teachers and replacing an implicit orientation toward required, on-the-job training for only new graduate teaching assistants (GTAs). As Shari J. Stenberg describes it, an orientation toward teacher development, rather than teacher

training, "requires a dialogue among new teacher, experienced teacher, and the field, with all three open to revision" (134). We have found it significant, therefore, to reconcile the genres of the teaching observation process with our values for teacher development. This patchwork of procedures and forms not only gives us a glimpse into a writing teacher's classroom but can also provide a "sense of character or identity" for the program that seeks to support the teacher (LaFrance 33). Ideally, over time teachers will grow more comfortable with the conversations this iterative process engages and experience a match between the observation process and the program discourse initiating it. Realistically, however, the context surrounding a single teaching observation can be hard to administratively wrangle, making it difficult to ensure that program values for teacher development are evident.

Our vision of the teaching observation process and accompanying forms as vectors for engaged, reflective, and reciprocally-minded administration of teacher development is framed by Carolyn R. Miller, Amy J. Devitt, and Victoria J. Gallagher's description of genre as a "fulcrum" that balances and governs the polarities that emerge from a number of tensions, including "innovation and conformity, stability and change, and form and substance, among others" (273). On one hand, the observation process is institutionally mandated (departmental units are required to have a documented process) and connected to issues of labor, union contracts, compensation metrics, and employment—a summative domain for the boss and supervisor. On the other hand, the process is programmatically volitional (we can shape it the way we want) and rooted in a shared commitment to collegiality, intellectual vibrancy, and professional development—a formative domain for the friend and colleague. While in administering this process, we aim to foreground the formative, reflective aspects of observations, other participants also carry their own values related to the process, its purposes, and their assigned tasks. That is our diplomatic way of saying that sometimes the process does not shake out the way we, as theoretically invested participants, hope it will. Encountering multiple, occasionally conflicting, dispositions toward conducting the work of teaching observations has led us to consider how to use the written document at the center of the process to more explicitly structure interactions between observer and observed teacher, so that each is engaged in reciprocal reflection on teaching.

Our years of conversational and collaborative work revising our program's teaching observation form have resulted in a twofold argument. First, a responsive and reciprocal praxis for teaching observations must be sustainably operationalized through the intentional design of the overall process, particularly through tangible artifacts such as email correspondence and the observation form. Second, the teaching observation form, as an object playing

a pivotal role in a series of social interactions, is a key example of a writing program genre with the potential to both demonstrate program values and frame responsible rhetorical interactions between program personnel. To craft this argument, we first review composition scholarship on teacher development and teaching observations to locate values of reciprocity and intentional reflection on teaching, drawing especially on Denise K. Comer's description of reciprocal teaching observations. We turn to Miller et al.'s description of genre as a "structurational nexus" that is the common feature within iterative communicative instances—like teaching observations—to illuminate our revision of the observation form and our attention to the tensions of the process (273). Presenting a timeline of our revision work, we explore how discussions about this process led to concrete changes in language and design and how users have responded to our revisions.[1] We believe our description will be useful to writing program administrators (WPAs) and other personnel working to align a program's processes, including teaching observations, with their vision and values for teacher development.

Writing Reciprocal Reflection into Teaching Observation Forms

As moments where writing program administration, mentoring, and the experience of teaching intersect, teaching observations are important sites of research and theorizing for a field (and local writing program economy) driven by the teaching of general education composition courses; these observations benefit from the innovation integral to the professional development schema of writing programs (Davies 106). Here, we consider scholarship on what teaching observations ideally accomplish, why reciprocity and reflection are often hard to engage in teaching observations, and how teaching observations can be better structured to support reciprocal, reflective interactions between observer and teacher.

Comer's description of "reflective, reciprocal supervisory classroom visits" showcases the ways these visits are the sum of multiple logistical and interpersonal components. Arguing that these visits contribute not only to the development of the individual teacher, but also of the program, Comer details the ways that administrative talk about the purpose and experience of these observations influences the degree to which these visits are effective for participants (519). These visits can help WPAs (and, we add, other faculty) promote program growth through shared dialogue about teaching, especially when the observation form includes space for the observer to reflect, in writing, about what they learn (529). The "collective, social pedagogy" explored through these classroom visits, then, mirrors emphasis on the social construction of writing (and improves how teaching colleagues can collaboratively strategize writing instruction for students (519-520). Even evaluative observations,

when practiced as reciprocal learning experiences, bear significant potential to productively impact teaching and learning in writing programs.

However, the evaluative nature of the observation may also exacerbate tensions based on participants' various teaching backgrounds and commitments. Instructors teaching composition classes do not always want to be teaching them and may feel "disconnected" from the writing program (Wallis and Jankens 173)—their scholarly engagements may be elsewhere, or they may not share the student-centered values that drive the field (Wardle and Downs 124). The tensions related to "insider-ness" (Wardle and Downs 125) are especially evident in programs (like ours) where GTAs from across disciplines engage in required composition teaching practicum courses, though these tensions may live mostly under the surface (Restaino 6; Wallis and Jankens 172). As Adrienne and our colleague Jule Wallis describe in "Collaborative Development: Reflective Mentoring for GTAs," "If GTAs come with strongly held concepts and belief systems that they are unwilling to remix, or if they do not find validity in the new teaching practices they are being asked to integrate into their own pre-determined identities, then anger, anxiety, and confusion may occur" (172).

Because these classroom visits can often be experienced as perfunctory—or, worse, "excruciating" (Comer 518)—it is especially important to explicitly frame the observation as a formative feedback structure intended to support teacher development (Anson 101; Comer 518; Flanigan 17). In formative sessions, Chris Anson suggests, "A teacher and a close colleague invited to sit in on her class have social parity. The colleague's purpose is not to judge the outcome of the teacher's ability but to provide *input* that encourages thoughtful reflection, subsequent experimentation, and higher levels of awareness and knowledge" (101). However, because this social parity might not be felt between some observers (i.e., between WPAs or other full-time faculty and the instructors being observed), the stated goal of the observation *must be* reciprocal learning; it must be the interrogation and challenging of beliefs and practices as part of intentional reflection in teacher development (Rose and Finders 79). The process should include "deliberate mechanisms for transparency" and an "overt" direction that "advice should flow both ways" (Comer 521-22). These directions can invite and support the kind of "messy teaching conversation" that is integral to mutual reflection (Johnsen et al. 121). With this dialogic space in the observation process, both parties might experience something like what Comer describes in the "watershed" observation conversations that shaped her perspective: "Instead of talking only about my performance, we discussed issues that traversed our classroom walls, such as how we can best position student writing as central in both our classes and how we both work to encourage more student-to-student interaction" (518).

Cultivating reciprocal learning and the larger vision of teacher development supported by this learning is complicated. As noted above, instructors may come from vastly different educational or intellectual backgrounds, have complex personalities, or prioritize different values. However, the teaching observation experience can help every participant prioritize "an attitude of reflection, inquiry, and ongoing investment and growth" as essential teaching practices (Schell 229). For that to happen, it is essential that dialogue is embedded in and guided by the teaching observation form and structured throughout the process, as "attention to the discursive practices of reflection and collaboration" is an important part of training writing program personnel to conduct and engage in the mentoring aspects of teaching observations (Wallis and Jankens 173). To contend with the "relatively little time or energy" that those involved in teacher development have for iterative attention to all instructors in a program, as they shift from mentoring one new cohort to the next , this structure can support consistency in participants' experiences with the process (Bamberg 147). Even in the short-term bounds of the relationships demanded by administratively directed teaching observations, the "mutual benefit and respect" paramount for the development of a collegial professional community must be evident, and this expectation of respect explicitly written into the process (Eble 307).

Structuration and the Teaching Observation Form

To encourage reciprocity and intentional reflection in the process, we can examine the written semantics of the observation process. The genres commonly used in writing programs, including teaching observation forms and the email correspondence through which these observations are coordinated, represent programmatic interests and shape how those interests are carried out (Devitt et al. 543). We carefully note that there is likely a distinction between what programmatic interests are conveyed in genres like teaching observation forms, and what interests or values individual members of a writing program might bring with them into engaging with these forms. Nevertheless, teaching observation processes, and forms in particular, provide WPAs with snapshots to reflect on and shape programmatic identity. In its location at the fulcrum of reciprocal teacher development, the teaching observation form can be designed both to reflect the program and to provide dialogic space for individuals' development through productive tensions.

Structurational theory helps us articulate how we see the observation process, form, and participants as constituting an "immediate nexus of interaction, as contingently accomplished or 'brought off' by actors, social reproduction in its most elemental sense" (Giddens 96). As Miller et al. explain, "Structuration is the explanatory nexus between individuals and collectivities, between the

concreteness and particularity of action and the abstractness and endurance of institutions. Genre is one such structurational nexus, the aspect of situated communicative action that is capable of reproduction, and thus is the means by which these polarities produce and maintain each other" (273). We see such a structurational nexus as shaped, in part, by the semantic logics of the form and the values articulated in its written language. In other words, the teaching observation form, through its structuration—the ways it is designed, organized, and written—offers a way to both represent the teacher development values of the program and mediate the necessary discussion and reflection between observer and instructor that occurs throughout the teaching observation process.

Additionally, we see that our recent revisions to the form might allow us "to better articulate the social nature of emotions and the role they play in our collective life" (Miller et al. 275). These revisions intend to make visible (and normalize) spaces for the surfacing of a range of emotional, ideological, and practical tensions as part of what it means to reflect on teaching, a complex and sometimes fraught process. In that way, we acknowledge that the addition of more space for descriptive prose, as we describe below, may make space for observation documentation that produces the "near-overwhelming anxiety" and "excruciating self-centeredness" Comer describes feeling during experiences that "yielded little except injury, falsity, and wastefulness" (518). However, we may also see that, in making this space, there is a possibility for documentation that reflects Brian Jackson's admission that, during some observations, the observer "can barely hold back [their] excitement"—an energized documentation that would likely quell instructors' anxiety. The space for descriptive prose might also result in even more complex observation accounts that document envy-fueled irritations, students who appear to have crystallized into "cocoons of contempt" and liken "bad teaching" to "watching an angry parent bark at a child in a grocery store," descriptions that, while difficult, may reveal moments for necessary discussion (Jackson 46). While a range of tensions may be visible in the discursive spaces in the form, these spaces might also be structured to facilitate reflection between observer and instructor on the varied experiences of the observation.

Revising the Teaching Observation Form: Uncovering Challenges and Possibilities

Here, we set the stage for the design and structuration of our present version of the teaching observation form and process by reviewing several years of revisions and analyzing the attendant processes of this work. Some of the features and experiences we recount may be familiar to WPAs and instructors who have worked through the challenges of completing or reviewing observa-

tion forms, which must account for so much classroom activity in the bounds of a checklist, ranking system, or limited white space.

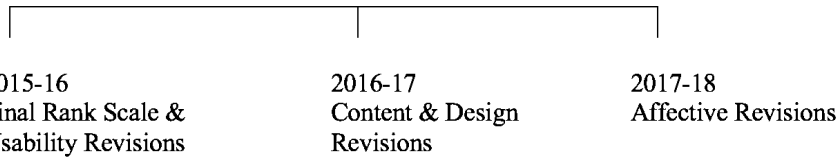


Fig. 1. Timeline of Teaching Observation Form Revisions

Reviewing Evaluative Rankings and Observable Behaviors

Anecdotal evidence told us the original, pre-2015 form we used for teaching observations across the department regularly posed interpretive tensions. In particular, the final ranking scale in the form was complicated for both observers and instructors; observers were asked to rank the instructor's overall performance as "Excellent," "Good," "Fair," or "Poor"—a system often perceived differently by users. Observers, conscientious of instructors' reception of the form, sometimes marked an instructor's performance as "Good" when they meant "Fair," perceiving that these descriptors correlated with a grading system (i.e., that "Excellent" was an "A"; "Fair" was a "C"). In the rare case an instructor received a check in the "Fair" category, this marking became a point of contention; several times, in her mentoring role, Adrienne entered the scene to alleviate instructors' concerns about any long-term impact of this mark. A further issue for many observers was that some behaviors or classroom elements they were asked to evaluate in the form could not be marked on the quantifying scale: "Almost Always," "Sometimes," "Rarely," or "Never" (Figure 2). For example, items like purpose-setting at the beginning of a class session or the inclusion of assignment criteria in a rubric were either present or not. We replaced this quantifying scale with a checklist of categories of observable behaviors.[2] This was a significant revision for helping teachers understand that we do not expect to see every item on the form happening in every class session; instructional choices, topic, and student needs are interrelated determining factors in what happens in a classroom on any given day.

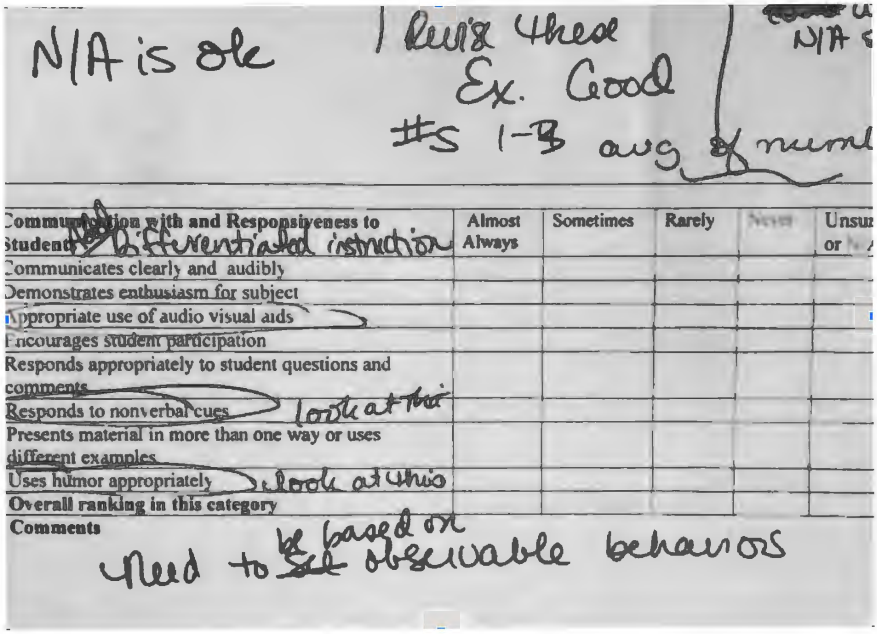


Fig 2. Jottings on Revision of the Initial Teaching Observation Form

Revision in subsequent semesters included several other content and design changes. First, we understood that knowing more about the context of the observation was important for anyone reviewing the form. Understanding how our university's students fare at different class times or which classrooms commonly have technology or environmental issues is important institutional knowledge that can impact how observation notes are read and how teachers make instructional choices. Thus, in the opening section of the form, we added items for marking the location of the observation, the duration of the class, and the time of day. Second, the syllabus review, a lengthy checklist of syllabus components, bled onto the second page, which both tripped up observers filling out the form (they would miss boxes) and gave too much weight to that part of the process (emphasizing administrative oversight); this review was revised to fit on one page. Finally, we added items related to differentiated instruction, use of classroom space, and instructors' responses to the felt sense of the work of the classroom, issues often noted in write-ups of classroom visits, but noticeably missing from the structured elements of the form. Overall, we worked to provide a more comprehensive set of observable behaviors, providing observers with a stronger vocabulary to "record observations quickly, thoroughly, legibly, and in detail" (Flanigan 18).

These revisions supported the way the form functioned as a stand-alone document; however, because our program positions teaching observations as a

part of more robust teacher development, we also understood that we needed to revise our attention to the processes surrounding the document. In an Academic Year (AY) 2017-18 meeting, Adrienne informally surveyed mentoring committee participants to identify spots on the form that incite discussion between observers and teachers, so that we could better address these elements in pre-observation conversations or in wider professional development initiatives. In that conversation, we shared our experiences talking about the observation process with teachers before the classroom visit and after they reviewed the completed form. Committee members came to conversational agreement that particular items on the form, like "Responds appropriately to students' questions and comments" or "Assesses/monitors student understanding and/or learning," are especially generative talking points for teachers and observers.

Analyzing Emails for Invitations to Reciprocity

In addition to acknowledging the dialogic work that happens around the observation form and process, some of the work of engaging the reciprocal reflection that we value in our teacher development may be found in the other texts that surround the observation. For example, the mentoring committee designed a document outlining expectations for productive, generative teaching observations.[1] As the observation administrator, Adrienne reviewed the document with observers at the start of the year, sent it to both observers with their observation assignments, and housed the document online in a shared folder that contained backups of all observation documents. She emailed both teacher and observer to begin the process and provided observers with a simple email template for opening conversation. However, of course, not all the language setting the tone for these conversations is handed down by committee or administration. Observers themselves participate in the creation of documents that sets the tone for these meetings. Here, we look briefly at engagement and context-providing emails sent by Joe to a teacher he was assigned to observe in AY 2017-18 to examine how he attended to the tensions of the process and invited reflection about teaching.

Upon receiving the initial form email Adrienne sent to all instructors, Joe followed up with his assigned teacher to engage conversation, request materials, and set a date for the observation.

1. "Directions and Best Practices for Conducting Online Teaching Observations." 29 Sept. 2021. docs.google.com/document/d/1rnyJds8483MdlndfhSzzeTpfuooUR_EFxM4EPttNpEU/edit?usp=sharing. Accessed 7 June 2023.

I was pleased to learn I will be observing your teaching this semester. I am happy to chat informally about your class before the observation if you'd like. It's certainly not necessary, but in the past some instructors have found it helpful to discuss the dynamics of their class before the observation. If that's something you'd like to do, just let me know.

You may also, at your convenience, send me the following:

1) A digital copy of your course syllabus
2) An assignment sheet for one of the major projects
3) Written feedback you provided to students on the assignment you selected in number 2 above

I find it helpful to have reviewed the syllabus prior to classroom observation, but the other materials can be sent before or after the observation.

When you're ready to begin the process in earnest, perhaps send me a date or two that you might want to target for observation. I'll do my best to accommodate your preference for scheduling.

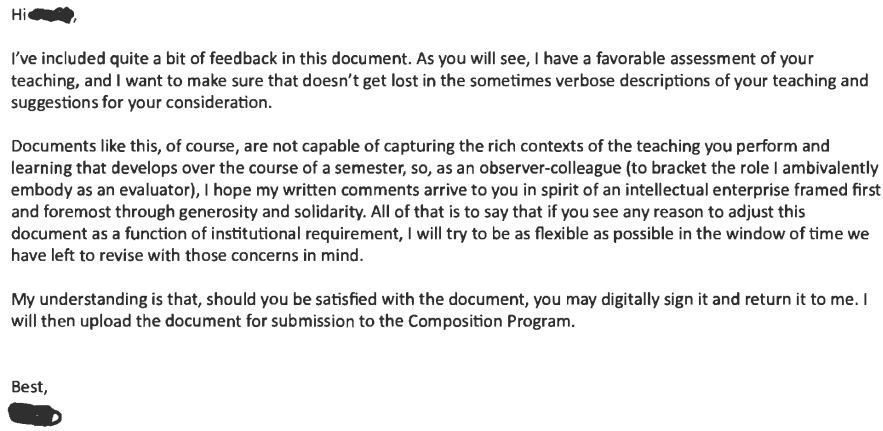
Best,

Fig. 3. Joe's Initial Email to Instructor Re: Observation

The first thing we noticed when we reviewed Joe's initial email was his use of positive adjectives: "I am pleased" and "I am happy." He qualified parts of the observation process: "It's certainly not necessary, but in the past some instructors have found it helpful to discuss the dynamics of their class before the observation." Joe also directly invited conversation, writing about this proposed pre-observation meeting, "If that's something you'd like to do, just let me know." Finally, though these are directed and essential parts of the observation process, Joe crafted three generous moments related to the process in his requests for materials, possible dates for the observation, and scheduling preferences.

In Joe's follow-up email to the instructor, in which he attached the completed form, he foregrounded two items to demonstrate his attention to some of the tensions that emerge when these documents are shared (Figure 4). He opened with an acknowledgement of the amount of feedback included in the observation form, the sight of which can be overwhelming and scary to

instructors, and he foregrounded that his overall assessment of the observed teaching was "favorable."



Hi [redacted],

I've included quite a bit of feedback in this document. As you will see, I have a favorable assessment of your teaching, and I want to make sure that doesn't get lost in the sometimes verbose descriptions of your teaching and suggestions for your consideration.

Documents like this, of course, are not capable of capturing the rich contexts of the teaching you perform and learning that develops over the course of a semester, so, as an observer-colleague (to bracket the role I ambivalently embody as an evaluator), I hope my written comments arrive to you in spirit of an intellectual enterprise framed first and foremost through generosity and solidarity. All of that is to say that if you see any reason to adjust this document as a function of institutional requirement, I will try to be as flexible as possible in the window of time we have left to revise with those concerns in mind.

My understanding is that, should you be satisfied with the document, you may digitally sign it and return it to me. I will then upload the document for submission to the Composition Program.

Best,
[redacted]

Fig. 4. Joe's Follow-Up Email to Instructor Post-Observation

From there, Joe conceded the messiness and difficulty of observation moments and forms, noting the document cannot possibly capture "the rich contexts of the teaching" the instructor performs or how students learn over time. Then, with humility, he framed his invitation to dialogue: "I hope my written comments arrive to you in [the] spirit of an intellectual enterprise framed first and foremost through generosity and solidarity." Joe followed this statement up by explaining that the document could be revised through conversation, particularly if the instructor was concerned about it as an institutional record. Finally, Joe was transparent about his responsibility to the observation process: there was a timeline in which he had to upload documents. In this exchange, Joe's transparency reflected a responsible explicitness about the administrative demands of the process and overt attention to the dialogic quality of the observation (Comer 522).

Our review of the emails helped us think about how we could better foreground the formative aspects of the process. We discussed moments in the emails where Joe could have been even more forthright. For example, for Joe, reviewing the syllabus before visiting the class was helpful, so if that syllabus review was the precursor to a fuller observation experience for both parties, we discussed how he might say so more directly. Joe's emails became a demonstrative part of the multidimensional fulcrum of the observation process in positive ways; we thought about how we would encourage all observers to explicitly describe to instructors how they would engage in the process, both during the class session and afterward. Reviewing the emails, we could not help but think

that offering this dialectic language to observers for use in their documented exchanges with instructors would be a way to open possibilities for reciprocal exchanges that invite participation and promote constructive dialogue, particularly where such dispositions might not exist or might need development.

Structuring the Social Nature of the Teaching Observation Form

Through our review of previous revisions and our analysis of emails, we identified an opportunity to more explicitly define and promote our program's values for teacher development by attending to design, language, logics, and usability. As we engaged in revisions, we began to suspect, like Comer, that the observation form itself may have been a core reason for the often ineffective or unreflective observations experiences reported by our colleagues (525). Thus, as we describe below, these most recent revisions to the form centered on encouraging reciprocal reflection and reducing the unproductive friction the process sometimes invites.

The language and design of the observation form was elaborated most significantly in the front and end matter of the document (Appendix B). We added a visual timeline with suggested pacing for the pre-observation meeting, observation, and post-observation meeting on the first page. While our process had previously emphasized the importance of the pre- and post-observation meetings for contextualizing and foregrounding a formative, reciprocal approach, we thought the revised form should devote substantial page-space to these moments as well. We included a full-page space for notes in addition to a bulleted list of conversation prompts to make explicit the purpose of the pre-observation meeting. Likewise, we included a full page at the end dedicated to the post-observation meeting. Following Comer's demonstration of similar pages , this opens an explicit discursive space wherein teachers are encouraged and expected to foreground their concerns, priorities, and reflections on teaching in our local context (534–35). This space also emphasizes that the observer's primary role in the pre-observation meeting is to listen, to learn "what is important to the teacher and what is especially important to attend to when visiting the teacher's class" (Flanigan 17). The bulleted list of conversation prompts offers participants, often from different pedagogical and educational backgrounds and with different amounts of classroom experience, a series of questions designed to invite a mentoring and collegial relationship.

We also wanted the form's language to address a recurring issue voiced by participants in previous semesters: initiating the process sometimes felt awkward or challenging. We included in the first and final pages brief instructional passages written to both facilitate the process and to directly address and attempt to assuage any affective baggage that might permeate the process. For instance, the language in the form's first page was elaborated to invite participants to

"get to know each other as colleagues" whose primary reason for pairing is to "discuss teaching goals." At the end of the form, observed teachers are directly addressed in a transparent and explicit narrative about the process's primary goal, which is that instructors confidently emerge from the observation process with better insight into the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching. The form explicitly encourages note taking throughout pre- and post-observation meetings to invite participants to construct an engaged and careful process that delivers reflective and formative feedback. In other words, the form, while not erasing the summative functions of the process completely, intentionally foregrounds the formative aspects of the process as a textual site that reifies the aspirational visions of the program (developing reflective, growth-oriented instructors) through language and design.

The teaching observation form, as an example of the structuration of the observation process and the program's communication of the value of teacher development to instructors, serves a key function for our community of instructors. It is not only "an untapped textual opportunity to improve the practice of supervisory class visits," it is also a generic manifestation of our program values for teacher development (Comer 526). We see our revisions as an important opportunity to re-describe and re-present the program using a common genre (the observation form) to align better with the values we strive for collectively. Our attention to using the form's language and spaces to direct reciprocal reflection between observers and instructors exemplifies our awareness of the form's multidimensionality and unique role in shaping the observation process, a significant structurational nexus in our program.

Feedback from Observers and Instructors

In April 2021, following two semesters of all teaching observations being conducted online during pandemic-driven remote instruction, we needed to assess whether and how the form was working in this new teaching context.[3] We conducted a feedback survey, reaching out to eight faculty-observers who had also used the previous version of the form and eleven GTAs who had been enrolled in practicum courses that year and had engaged weekly in program-oriented teacher development, for one or both semesters. We asked these colleagues (in their roles as observers or teachers) to provide commentary through an anonymous Google form, providing them with links to the observation form(s) for their review and with sentence-stems to begin their description of their experiences (see tables 1 and 2). The survey prompted faculty-observers to write about their impressions of using the 2018 revision of the form versus the 2016 version; it prompted GTAs to write about their experience using the revised form. We also prompted both groups to express what they thought the form indicates about program values; if we discovered

a significant mismatch in respondents' thoughts and our own analysis, we felt that might tell us which parts of the form required further revision. Overall, we received responses from five members of each group.

Below, in tables 1 and 2, we include excerpted feedback we received from respondents that indicates the range of experiences these colleagues have with using the form and the range of perspectives they have regarding how the form highlights program values for teacher development.

Table 1. Feedback from Faculty-Observers, April 2021 (excerpted)

Faculty-Observers	I remember my experience using the 2016-version of the teaching observation form as...	My experience using the 2018-version of the teaching observation form has been...	The language in the 2018-version of the teaching observation form reflects that our program values...
Observer A	I honestly can't recall. It's been too long.	I don't really find the first few pages to be helpful. I'd prefer to just have a form with the direct observation report—I am happy to schedule pre-post conversations and those are important, but I do not and have no intention of writing detailed summaries of those conversations. I view them as informal and informational to supplement the observation...	
Observer B	Distracting - the formatting was intrusive and limiting in terms of entering info.	Slightly better, but I still don't understand why there are pre-set fields for notes. It's a Word doc, just let people type into the page.	Student centered teaching and some degree of consistency across sections of comp taught by different people.
Observer C	I don't remember!	Very good. I find it a generative document for mentoring conversations.	Field-based knowledge about writing and the write process, clear communication with students

Observer D	Fine. It was slightly awkward in its setup, and the sections, though essentially the same as later versions didn't feel as clear or easy to use.	I would say a noticeable improvement thanks to the little tweaks that have integrated aspects of the observation process into the document itself, which gives clarity . . . seeing all the parts of the process represented on the timeline, as well as in the document itself, helps to calibrate everyone's expectations for how things will go, which also relieves anxiety and prevents miscommunication.	As a program, we value communication about teaching, and that everyone participating in that conversation is important, and can add to it.
Observer F	I remember it being rather stark and did not have the ability to place in pre and post notes or get feedback from the instructor being observed. There were also categories that might have been difficult to assess, so that often posed stress for the observed and observer.	I like the 2018 version because there is space for pre and post meeting notes. I also think that it better addresses what we hope to observe and evaluate when it come to teaching best practices and opens up the line of communication and collaboration	By opening up a third space for communication and engagement between the observed and observer. It also ~~. . .~~ uses action words to highlight key criteria for each section but in a more nuanced or open way so as to attend to different teaching styles.

Table 2. Feedback from GTAs in Teaching Practicum Courses in AY 2020-21, April 2021

GTAs	My experience using the teaching observation form was...	The language in the form shows me that the Composition Program values...
Teacher A	Easy.	Leadership, thoughtfulness, and approachability.
Teacher B	Easy and straightforward. However, some language might be edited in the context of online instruction.	The clarity of course objectives and that the assignments align with those objectives.
Teacher C	Smooth. Nothing about the form is necessarily opaque to me, though I think there's always a danger (and the form falls into this category) that forms of this type can't actually capture what happens in a given session, so my observer's own descriptive work is essential.	My ability to meet student learning outcomes and, less so, my ability to facilitate clear, productive class sessions.
Teacher D	Straightforward. I did not think anything was unclear. My observer was knowledgeable about the observation process which made it seem quite simple. However, both this and last semester, I have had issues with adding observers to my courses, which is quite frustrating.	The word salient.
Teacher F	Overall, very positive. The form covers every area I could think of in terms of my teaching and the way I set up the classroom. It gave my observer the opportunity to look at a wide range of topics related to my teaching.	Me, my teaching, and my development as a teacher.

Teachers seem to share the perspective that the form is "straightforward" and "easy" to use. Teacher F expresses that the form comprehensively addresses their teaching. Particular features of the form, mostly related to the presence of the discursive spaces that we found so important to integrate, received mixed reactions from faculty-observers. These mixed reactions were not about the need for conversation about the teaching observation, but about whether the form needs to direct that conversation, and to what extent. Observer D, for example, in a comment not represented in the table, notes, "Having the space for the initial meeting notes and the follow-up meeting notes is so helpful to ground those meetings and guide the discussion." However, Observer A states that though they see the conversations as "supplemental" but "important" to

the observation, they do not plan to write the details of those conversations; this response highlights a clear tension between what we see as a place for elucidating and practicing our program value of written reflection and what this observer sees as pertinent to the observation process (and worth their time). Further, Observer B provides feedback that the text-limiting fields are unnecessary in a Word document, helping us recognize essential accessibility-related issues requiring further (and long overdue) revision. However, overall, and despite relying primarily on memory, surveyed instructors expressed a sense of improvement when considering the revisions.

Regarding what the form might suggest about our program's values for teacher development, we see a range of feedback. Some feedback mirrors our description of reciprocity in this piece; other feedback focuses on student learning outcomes prominently featured in common syllabi, project descriptions, and assessment reports. Observers E and F offer comments that support the dialogic aspects of the reciprocity and reflection we have described. Observer E mentions "conversation and mentoring" are valued by the program and reflected in the form, explaining, "This demonstrates that as a program, we value communication about teaching, and that everyone participating in that conversation is important, and can add to it." Similarly, Observer F writes that the form provides a space for "communication and engagement between the observed and observer." Teacher F notes that the form suggests the program values their individual teacher development. Providing comments that show the program's attention to student learning outcomes, Teachers B and C, and Observers B and C emphasize student learning and communication to students as primary program values. The informal feedback provided through this program-based assessment of users' experiences with the teaching observation form emphasizes that teacher development (and the reflection inherent in it) cannot be separated from undergraduate students' learning.

Conclusion

We have presented the teaching observation form as a living document that has been iteratively shaped by our continuing efforts to make the inherent tensions of the teaching observation processes more productive for participants via our values of reflection and reciprocity. Though most of our initial revisions focused on clarifying what was being observed in classroom visits, our continued attention showed us that to cultivate a more sustainable process, we needed to also create cohesion between our values for teacher development and the direct content of the teaching observation form itself. Through gathering feedback from users (in committee meetings, in an informal survey, and in experiences along the way) and through design and content changes driven by our core values for teacher development and the

concept of structuration, we made strategic revisions to the form. These revisions, in turn, have begun to influence the process and its effect on participants. Recording our revision process and the contextual motivations behind these revisions will help us continue to sustain and assess the administration of our teaching observation process (Davies 82). We may, for example, consider Sushil K. Oswal's discussion of disabling workplaces or Quan Zhou and David K. Farkas's description of document formatting to further guide our next iteration of revisions. Additionally, formally studying this process and the inscription of reflection in the spaces of the observation form can help us learn more about the nature of observational tensions and the quality of reciprocity and reflection exercised in the communication between observer and teacher. Such analysis could provide us with further insight into our iterative revision process.

Writing program genres like teaching observation forms require methodical attention to revision that is focused both on sustaining working relationships between program personnel and responding to and representing the dynamic flux of the program's vision and values. For our larger audience, WPAs and others invested in teacher development and improving teaching observations, we hope that our attention to the documentation at the center of our teaching observation process supports a larger point about the ways that these single documents can reinforce or trouble a program's work. We invite readers to consider their own articulation of values for teacher development and the ways that the artifacts of the teaching observation process (e.g., guidelines, emails, checklists, reflections, etc.) support, resist, or redefine those values.

Notes

1. Our university's IRB concurred that this research fits the description of archival research, drawing from personal artifacts, program documents, and informal program assessment.

2. Several examples of teaching observation forms informed these revisions; a form from Baldwin-Wallace University's teacher education program was especially helpful because of its emphasis on observable best practices that support student learning.

3. We conducted this assessment concurrently with revising this manuscript and stated in the survey prompt: "By completing this form, you provide us with permission to use your feedback in an article-length write-up of our program's teaching observation process."

Appendix: Revised Teaching Observation Form, Used Since AY 2018-19.

Composition Teaching Observation (Classroom)

Instructor	Observer
Course Number/Title	Date/Time of Observation
Duration of Class	Location of Class
Date	Date

☐ Formal Observation

☐ Informal Observation

Initial Meeting

This informal meeting provides time and space for both instructor and observer to get to know each other as colleagues, discuss teaching goals and possible feedback, share observation materials such as syllabi and assignment sheets, and address any concerns or questions.

- What is your background in the teaching of writing?
- What experiences have you had teaching writing in the past?
- Has this been a typical semester for you? How so?
- What have been some of the positive experiences you've had this semester?
- Have you faced any challenges this semester?
- Do you have questions about the observation or the process?

Notes:

Instructional Materials

A. Syllabus

Instructors, please share a copy of your syllabus with the observer before the date of the observation. Observers will review the syllabus to complete the section bellow.

Course number, title, & section		Plagiarism policy	
Meeting days/times, room, semester, & year		Late work/make-up work	
Office hours/location		Classroom behaviors	
Instructor email		Writing Center info	
Course Description		Student Disabilities Services Office recommended statement	
General Education information		Academic Success Center info	
Outcomes		Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) info	
Required/recommended texts		Dean of Students' Office info	
Course requirements (relative weight, format requirements, & page counts)		Office of Military and Veterans Academic Excellence info	
Add/drop & withdrawal dates		Department of English info	
Grading policy, including incompletes		Calendar of class sessions	
Absence/tardy policy		Date/time of final exam, other exams & quizzes, & assignment due dates	

☐ Meets Expectations

☐ Does not meet Expectations

Notes:

B. Assignments, Comments, and Grading

Instructors, please share a copy of an assignment you have taught or are currently teaching this semester with the observer. Stemming from that assignment sheet, you will also share graded papers that include your feedback. Observers will review graded and commented on student papers (with the corresponding assignment description) to complete the section below.

Describes central goals, tasks, and criteria for evaluation in assignment instructions	
Evaluation rubric reiterates assignment goals and criteria	
Provides a range of feedback on issues of content, organization, style, and sentence-level issues	
Emphasizes strategies for student revision or future improvement	
Evaluates appropriately for assignment and level of student performance	

☐ Meets Expectations

☐ Does not meet Expectations

Notes:

Classroom Teaching

Instructors, below are sets of behaviors that may occur during an observation. Observers will complete the classroom teaching sections below based on notes from the observation.

A. Organization and Clarity

Begins class with materials and technology prepared	
Defines objectives for class presentation	
Links new ideas to previous classes or lessons	
Presents material appropriate to class level	
Explains important ideas simply and clearly	
Presents relevant examples	
Summarizes major points of lesson	

☐ Meets Expectations

☐ Does not meet Expectations

Notes:

B. Communication with and Responsiveness to Students

Communicates clearly and audibly	
Demonstrates enthusiasm for subject	
Uses audio/visual aids thoughtfully and appropriately	
Encourages student participation	
Responds appropriately to student questions and comments	
Responds to nonverbal cues	
Presents material in more than one way or uses different examples	
Accommodates various learning styles	
Modifies teaching strategies as needed	
Uses humor appropriately	
Uses classroom space effectively	

☐ Meets Expectations

☐ Does not meet Expectations

Notes:

C. Knowledge

Demonstrates competence with subject matter	
Translates abstract ideas and theories appropriately	
Encourages critical thinking and analysis	
Effectively answers student questions	

☐ Meets Expectations

☐ Does not meet Expectations

Notes:

D. Student-Centered Learning Activities

Uses group work as needed to support students' mastery of skills, concepts, and/or texts	
Defines and communicates appropriate objectives for individual or group work	
Provides clear, specific instructions for individual or group tasks	
Models procedures, dispositions, and results using artifacts or simulations	
Structures individual or group work effectively to guide students to accomplish tasks and reach objectives	
Models peer review strategies designed to elicit concrete feedback on specific aspects of student work	
Works with actual student texts in class	
Assesses/monitors student understanding and/or learning	

☐ Meets Expectations

☐ Does not meet Expectations

Notes:

Evaluation

Instructors, the observer will first use their observations and notes to form an overall evaluation of your teaching as viewed through the observation process. This evaluation section is not meant to be a reflection of the wider work you perform as a composition program instructor or teacher; the process of professional development in the teaching of writing matures along a career-long trajectory that is impossible to capture in the limited time and space of a single observation. As a small part of your longitudinal development in the profession, however, the Composition Program hopes this observational evaluation is one of many experiences that enrich you as a teacher of writing.

Observers will mark a final evaluation and then summarize salient observations that merit their evaluation in the notes space below. Observers should include both positive teaching behaviors that the teacher has demonstrated as well as suggested professional development and instructional strategies that the instructor can undertake to develop as professionals in the context of the Composition Program at [university] and as colleagues in the field.

☐ Meets Expectations

☐ Does not meet Expectations

Notes:

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