

Identifying a partner for peer review

(Authored by Kerri-Lee Harris)

By its very nature, peer review of teaching draws upon individuals' different – and sometimes quite diverse – perspectives and experiences. This is an inherent strength of peer review, and therefore there is no single rule for what constitutes an appropriate reviewer. Some peer review of teaching programs match individuals with two partners of different type, such as a departmental colleague and someone else from a very different discipline, seeking to capitalise on the different benefits involved.

The following are some of the possibilities:

	Advantages	Possible disadvantages
Colleague in the same discipline	Will have experience in teaching the same, or related, concepts. May be able to comment of the currency and accuracy of information ('content')	Focus on content may distract from the fundamentals, including the effect of the teaching on students.
Colleague in the same department	As for disciplinary colleague, with the added advantage of encouraging an open culture of discussion about teaching in the department, between colleagues.	Focus on content may distract from fundamentals, including the effect of the teaching on students.
Colleague from 'distant' discipline (e.g. arts with science; engineering with performing arts)	Potential for exposure to 'novel' teaching approaches. Reviewer likely to avoid distraction of specifics of the content and instead focus on the core aspects and effects of the teaching.	Reviewer may need more background information in order to understand the context of the subject and class.
Colleague experienced in university teaching	More likely to understand the 'practical realities' of teaching. Likely to have direct experience of various teaching strategies (although experience is neither necessary nor sufficient for effective peer feedback).	A large difference in 'seniority' can be a challenge to open and collegial feedback (although it need not be).
Colleague involved in teaching similar 'class types' (e.g. large classes; graduate level; clinical teaching)	Most likely to be able to share experiences and strategies.	
Colleague teaching in the same unit/course	If teaching in the same course, is aware of the overall course objectives. If teaching in the same unit, knows the student cohort and the specific role of the particular class in the overall unit design. Benefits for coordination – making connections between topics, and avoiding repetition – in team taught units.	Even more than with 'disciplinary colleague', reviewer can be distracted by the specifics of the content. Limits opportunities for introducing new ideas and strategies.

(Kerri-Lee Harris, 2010)