



Mentoring Program for Assistant Professors

The WKU English Department considers mentoring a valuable part of helping colleagues progress through the continuance, tenure, and promotion processes by providing feedback to help junior colleagues improve their teaching, scholarly/creative activity, and service. Junior colleagues are mentored in a number of different ways in our department: formal and informal conversations with the department head, program coordinators, and faculty at-large; departmental, college, and university programming; and peer collaborations and conversations.

Primary Mentors

The department also provides junior faculty with formal mentoring by a tenured colleague. The department head will assign primary mentors to new colleagues after they are appointed. Efforts will be made to select a primary mentor whose area of specialization aligns with that of the new colleague. Primary mentors will reach out to mentees at least three times each semester and make a special effort to engage with them before and during their first semester. Mentees should feel comfortable contacting their mentors whenever they have questions.

Primary mentors and mentees should discuss teaching, establishing a pipeline of scholarly/creative activity, and developing a service agenda in broad terms; other topics might include promotion procedures; balancing work and personal life; working with graduate students; dealing with problem students; navigating the WKU bureaucracy; etc. Mentees might also ask mentors to respond to drafts of their scholarly/creative work.

One special role that primary mentors have is to help mentees reflect on and refine their pedagogy. Mentors will observe mentees' classes regularly and invite mentees to their own classes using the department's *Guidelines for Formative Teaching Observations*. These observations are meant to facilitate conversations about teaching between mentee and mentor and to help both participants improve their teaching. The purpose is not to impose a particular pedagogy but to help both parties become more aware of their pedagogical aims and how to achieve them.

During the first year, mentees should invite primary mentors into their classes at least twice; it is up to the mentee and mentor to decide whether these visits take place once each semester or two in the same semester. In their second and third years, mentees should invite primary mentors to their classes at least once a year. Mentors should invite mentees to their classes at least once a semester the first year and once a year the second and third years. Colleagues teaching online classes may invite mentors to observe units/weeks instead of individual lessons.

Using the *Guidelines for Formative Teaching Observations* (Appendix I), the mentor and mentee will have conversations about their teaching with an effort for mutual improvement. Mentors will not submit a formal report, but both participants should take notes on their meetings and include comments and experiences from the observations in their continuance folders and annual reviews. Mentors should keep in mind that these observations provide valuable insights into the mentee's teaching for the department to consider in evaluating the mentee's continuance file.

Secondary Mentors

After the first year, the department head will consult biennially with junior colleagues to select secondary teaching mentors whose roles are more evaluative than formative. Each secondary mentor will serve a two-year term.

In the second year, the mentee will invite Secondary Mentor A to complete at least one *formative* observation to encourage familiarity in the fall semester and one *evaluative* observation using the department's *Guidelines for Evaluative Teaching Observations* (Appendix II) later in the fall or during the spring semester. If the mentee wishes to have an online or hybrid class observed, the mentor will complete a formative observation of one unit/week in the fall and an evaluative observation in the spring. In the third year, mentees will arrange at least one evaluative class observation with Secondary Mentor A. This pattern will be repeated with Secondary Mentor B, with one formative and one evaluative observation in year 4 and one evaluative observation in year 5.

Secondary mentors will submit observation memos to the department head as described in the guidelines. The department head will provide copies to the mentees who will respond to the memos in their annual reviews, continuance reviews, and tenure and promotion applications as appropriate.

In the second year of a secondary mentor's term (years 3 and 5), if the mentee and mentor would like to engage in an alternative teaching evaluation arrangement in place of a classroom observation—such as designing, implementing, and assessing a new assignment; attending a CITL workshop together and implementing strategies learned; or a similar kind of activity—they may submit a request to the department head detailing the proposed activity and means of documentation. In such cases, the secondary mentor will submit a memo assessing the mentee's pedagogical reflectiveness and growth as demonstrated in the interaction.

Each secondary mentor will serve a two-year term.

Flow of Secondary Mentor visits

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total visits
Primary Mentor Visits	2	1	1			
Secondary Mentor A	0	2 (1F +1E)	1 (E)			
Secondary Mentor B				2 (1F +1E)	1 (E)	
TOTAL VISITS/year	2	3	2	2	1	

Appendix I Guidelines for Formative Teaching Observations

The WKU English Department values classroom observation as one means of improving teaching. The primary purpose of *formative* observations is to help all faculty improve their teaching. When colleagues observe each other, they can help each other become better teachers; watching instructors in action can also help observers reflect on their own teaching. We value formative observations because they generate a helpful conversation after the class meeting that encourages observer and instructor to reflect on their teaching practices.

The WKU English Department values a variety of pedagogies (lecture, discussion, cooperative, problem-based, project-based, online, etc.) as means to educate students; however, we identify three broad components which permeate almost every approach: **content** (command of the material, scope of lesson, development/illustration of points, high expectations, etc.); **interaction** (encouragement of participation, clear and provocative questions, effective response to student comments/questions, room for opposing views, inclusive environment); and **presentation** (effective delivery/communication, clarity of explanations, effective use of relevant audio-visual aids).

Observers should keep in mind the instructors' pedagogy and aims as they observe and not impose their own pedagogy or style on instructors. The aims of these interactions should be to help the instructors improve their practices by offering constructive feedback and for the observers to consider how what they observe might contribute to their own teaching practices.

When instructors invite colleagues into their classrooms, they should follow these steps:

1. Confer with the observing colleague to discuss what feedback would be most useful and to determine the best days/times for the observation.
2. Once a mutually agreeable time is set, send your class syllabus, a brief statement contextualizing your lesson for the day, and a reminder of the areas/issues that you would like the observer to give special attention.
3. Observers should be as unobtrusive as possible and not participate in the class, unless for specific purposes discussed in advance.
4. During the class period, observers should base their responses on the three components bolded above (content, interaction, presentation). They should track any questions they have about instructors' approaches and why they choose the strategies they choose. These questions will be helpful prompts for the follow-up conversation.
5. Immediately after the class, observers should approach the instructors to give them some encouragement and to establish a time for conversation within a day or two after the lesson.
6. During the conversation, the observer should use the three components to guide the discussion, comment on the strengths of the class, offer constructive suggestions, and pose questions about the class. Observers might also comment on how the class made them think about their own pedagogy. The best conversations will be ones in which both participants come away with new ideas about improving their teaching.
7. Observers and instructors should take notes during the conversation and incorporate any helpful suggestions, alterations, or reinforcement of their pedagogies into their annual reviews and/or continuance folders.

Appendix II Guidelines for Evaluative Teaching Observations

The WKU English Department values classroom observation as one means of improving teaching. The department uses *formative* observations to help all faculty improve their teaching, but we use a separate process for *evaluative* observations related to tenure and promotion. Certainly, classroom evaluations have a formative component providing colleagues with information to improve their teaching, but the primary aim is to evaluate the effectiveness of specific lessons.

The WKU English Department values a variety of pedagogies (lecture, discussion, cooperative, problem-based, project-based, online, etc.) as means to educate students; however, we identify three broad components which permeate almost every approach: **content** (command of the material, scope of lesson, development/illustration of points, etc.); **interaction** (encouragement of participation, clear and provocative questions, effective response to student comments/questions, room for opposing views, inclusive environment); and **presentation** (effective delivery/communication, clarity of explanations, effective use of relevant audio-visual aids). Observers should use these components to organize their responses to class visits.

Observers should keep in mind the instructors' pedagogy and aims as they observe and not impose their own pedagogy or style on the instructor. The primary question to answer is *given the pedagogy and material selected, how effective or valuable was the classroom instruction?*

When instructors invite colleagues into their classrooms, they should follow these steps:

1. Confer with the observing colleague to discuss what feedback would be most useful and to determine the best days/times for the observation.
2. Once a mutually agreeable time is set, send your class syllabus, a brief statement contextualizing your lesson for the day, and a reminder of the areas/issues that you would like the observer to give special attention.
3. Observers should be as unobtrusive as possible and not participate in the class, unless for specific purposes discussed in advance.
4. During the class period, observers should base their responses on the three components bolded above (content, interaction, presentation).
5. Immediately after the class, observers should approach the instructors to thank them for the opportunity to observe and to give them some encouragement.

The Memo

1. Within a day of the class meeting, the observer should write a memo between one and two pages. The memo should open with an indication of who was observed, course number and name, class date and time, number of students present, and enrolled.¹
2. In the body of the memo, the observer should evaluate the lesson based on the content, interaction, and presentation. Observers should be especially careful not to impose their pedagogy or style on the instructor, and to evaluate the instruction based on the instructor's pedagogy. Observers should include specific examples of strengths and weaknesses of the lesson to illustrate their evaluations, particularly regarding the area identified by the mentee for special attention.
3. Observers should close their memos with a summative comment on their overall impression of the lesson, sign the memo, and deliver a copy to the department head. The department head will review the letter, consult with the mentor if clarification is needed, and then provide copies to instructors.
4. Instructors should address the comments from their evaluations in their applications for continuance, promotion, and tenure as appropriate.

¹ In the event that an alternative activity is chosen, the memo will instead include a brief description of the activity and its context, and reflection on the mentee's reflectiveness and growth as an instructor.