

Psychology Department Direct Observation Guidelines

Accepted as Department Guidelines effective May 25, 2021

Votes in online secret ballot (tenured/tenure-track faculty): Yes (16), No (0), Abstain (0)

Approved by College of Social Sciences effective June 4, 2021

The previous direct observation policy, procedure, and form needed to be revisited in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences for teaching. These were developed during a time when in-person classes were the default instructional mode. However, during the COVID pandemic, online instructional modes became the default. And, even as we move toward a post-pandemic era, online instructional mode offerings are very likely to continue at a higher rate than prior to the pandemic.

The current department policy updates the previous policy and addresses several goals, including (a) describing each step of the observation process to ensure an equitable evaluation process, (b) using a procedure and form that is broadly applicable to any instruction mode, and (c) consolidating the guidelines, procedure, and form into a single document.

Structure of Observations

All tenure-track, temporary full-time, and part-time faculty members participate in peer evaluation of their teaching. [University Policy F12-6](#) briefly describes the process for direct observation:

As one component of the evaluation of teaching, faculty will be observed by their peers. These direct observations are designed to evaluate teaching within the broad context of factors... Direct observations may consist of visits to the classroom, laboratory, or supervisory sessions. *For courses with majority electronic or online content, direct observations will consist of peer observers experiencing the course content from the vantage-point of the students [italics added].*

Additional details governing direct observations can be found in the [Collective Bargaining Agreement](#) (Article 15).

Assignment of Direct Observations

Chair responsibilities. All direct observations will be assigned by the department chair. The observers must be currently employed as SJSU faculty members of at least equal academic rank as the faculty member being observed, and preferably of higher academic rank.

Faculty responsibilities. The psychology department policy was designed to ensure that faculty obtain the required number of direct observations prior to review. A faculty member who has not received the required number of direct observations will remind the department Chair of the need for additional observations at least one month prior to a periodic review, but preferably one semester prior to review.

Timeline of Direct Observations

Tenured/Tenure-Track Faculty will receive one direct observation per year until one year after tenure and/or promotion to Associate Professor, across the full range of courses taught.

Following that, the department policy is that one direct observation will be conducted every 3 years for all faculty until full professorship is reached. Candidates for promotion to full professor must have at least two different courses observed. Upon promotion to full professor, direct observations will occur upon request for post-tenure review. The Chair, RTP committee, or a faculty member can request additional direct observations at any point.

Temporary faculty will receive one direct observation per year until 7 years after hire, across the full range of courses taught. Following the 7th year, direct observations will occur at least once during each appointment (e.g., one-year or three-year appointments).

Direct observations will generally occur in the fall semester. Exceptions may include when a class is only offered in the spring, or in the case where a temporary faculty is hired to start in the spring semester (see Senate Policy F12-6, "Faculty in temporary positions shall receive a direct observation in at least one course during their first semester of appointment"). If the person assigned to do the direct observation does not complete the assigned observation in the fall, the direct observation will be re-assigned for the spring semester.

Scheduling of the Direct Observation

The individual assigned to do the observation is responsible for contacting the instructor who will be observed. If the observer does not contact the instructor, the instructor is responsible for notifying the Chair to ensure that the instructor receives an adequate number of direct observations as required by University policy and the CBA.

Direct Observation Procedure

Due Dates

- **Report to instructor and chair due:** [insert date]
- **Instructor optional response due to chair:** [insert date]

Process

1. The department chair is responsible for assigning direct observations and ensuring that the direct observations follow the appropriate guidelines.
2. The peer observer is responsible for contacting the instructor to make arrangements for the direct observation. Check in with the instructor both before and after you conduct your observation.
 - a. If the observer does not contact the instructor in a timely manner after assignments have been distributed, the instructor is responsible for notifying the Chair. This is to ensure that instructors receive an adequate number of direct observations as required by the RTP and contract renewal process, including an adequate variety of classes observed.
 - b. **All direct observations must be scheduled with at least five days' notice** and in consultation with the faculty member under observation.
3. **Before the observation**
 - a. The instructor shall complete a short form describing various aspects of the course that will inform and guide the observation, and provide this to the observer.
 - i. Identify the typical course demographics and aims (e.g., primarily lower or upper division course; primarily psychology majors or a GE course that serves students from many different majors).
 - ii. Identify any aspects of the course for which they would particularly like to receive feedback (e.g., pace of lecture, student engagement during a new activity, etc.).
 - iii. Identify the [instruction mode](#) of the course.
 - iv. If the course has an online component, discuss the online/remote teaching philosophy/goals and how it is instantiated within the course.
 - v. Identify the preferred *unit of observation* (e.g., one course session/lecture; one module within Canvas; one content section; a mix of one lecture and assignment in Canvas)
 - b. Consult with the instructor to determine the specific unit of observation and instructional content that will be observed for each evaluation element and list these in the Psychology Direct Observation Form. The time needed to observe this content should be approximately 1.25 - 1.50 hours in total.
 - i. In most cases, an observed lecture - whether live or recorded - will be used to inform all aspects of the direct observation.
 - ii. However, because online instructional modes may have non-traditional ways of delivering course content and engaging students, this process allows greater

flexibility in more fully capturing an instructor's educational approach. For example, for an asynchronous or online hybrid course:

1. A recorded lecture may be relevant to the *communication, relevance of content to course description, and knowledge of subject matter* aspects of the observation
 2. A discussion board assignment may be relevant to the *interactions with students, and expectations for demonstration of higher order thinking* aspects of the observation.
 - c. Ask to be added to the Canvas course shell as a Faculty Peer Reviewer. Access to course materials (handouts, syllabus) should be requested if these materials are not available on Canvas. For courses with a live component (i.e., in-person and synchronous online), set up a time to observe. If the course is being taught synchronously, request the relevant Zoom information.
4. Observe the instructor's class management (e.g., use of time, use of group activities), flexibility, adaptability in the course session.
 5. The report should acknowledge any unfavorable conditions in the learning environment beyond the control of the faculty member.
 - 6. After the observation.**
 - a. In the spirit of making this a useful professional development opportunity, it is expected that the observer will arrange to discuss these observations with the instructor in a timely manner, after the observation and before submission of the final report.
 - b. The observer should provide a draft of the report to the instructor so that they can check it for accuracy and provide any factual corrections to the report.
 - c. The report should acknowledge any unfavorable conditions in the learning environment beyond the control of the faculty member.
 - 7. The final report is due within fifteen (15) working days after completion of the class observation.**
 8. Observers, please send a final copy of your report to the Associate Chair, valerie.carr@sjsu.edu AND to the instructor.
 - a. Send only the Direct Observation Form. That is, delete pages 1 - 4 (direct observation structure and procedure)
 - 9. Instructors have the right to respond to or rebut in writing the report within five (5) working days after receiving the report.**

Psychology Direct Observation Form Revised XXX

Faculty Observed	
Course	
Semester	
Observation Date	
Name of Observer	

This section to be completed by the instructor and discussed with the observer prior to the direct observation.

Instruction Mode	
-------------------------	--

Instruction Modes

in-person (mode = P)	Class is offered in person with designated day/time and location. This may include additional online material.
in-person hybrid (mode = 5)	Class is offered In-Person & Asynchronous online . Class is offered with 2 meeting patterns; the first meeting pattern is in person with a designated day/time on-campus location. The second meeting pattern has no designated day/time (TBA) or location.
Synchronous (mode = 2)	Class is offered completely online with designated day/time meeting pattern.
online hybrid (mode = 10)	Class is offered synchronous and asynchronous online elements with 2 meeting patterns; the first meeting pattern has a designated day/time. Location is OnLine. The second meeting pattern is also online with no designated day/time (TBA) and OnLine Location
Asynchronous (mode = 1)	Class is offered completely online with no designated day/time meeting pattern (TBA)

Unit of Observation	
----------------------------	--

Examples: one course session/lecture; one module within Canvas; one content section; a mix of one lecture and assignment in Canvas

[Deadlines and instructions for turning in form, delete the proceeding policy and procedure before turning the form, etc.]

Specific Instructional Content Observed

- Describe what specific instructional content you would like observed for each category in the observation form. The total time needed to observe this content should be 1.25 - 1.50 hours.
- **Be specific** when listing the instructional content to help the observer locate the material as needed (e.g., Lecture topic + lecture date, Canvas module name, specific assignment to review; specific discussion board topic)
 - In most cases, an observed lecture - whether live or recorded - will be used to inform all aspects of the direct observation.
 - However, this form allows for greater flexibility in capturing different types of instruction. For example, for an asynchronous or online hybrid course:
 - A recorded lecture may be relevant to the *communication, relevance of content to course description, and knowledge of subject matter* aspects of the observation
 - A discussion board assignment may be relevant to the *interactions with students, and expectations for demonstration of higher order thinking* aspects of the observation.

Observation Category	Instructional Content Observed
1. Course Syllabus	Course syllabus
2. Canvas/Course Website	Canvas and course website if applicable
3. Communication. <i>This section is based on the observed and inferred communications of the faculty member pertaining to the observed interaction.</i>	[examples: lecture topic + lecture date, Canvas module name, specific assignment to review; specific discussion board topic]
4. Relevance of content to course description and Course Learning Outcomes. <i>The assignments and content discussed should be both educationally effective and lead to intentional learning (i.e., correspond to explicit outcomes identified as appropriate for the course)</i>	
5. Knowledge of Subject Matter. <i>The content discussed/presented during the observation should clearly indicate knowledge or expertise in the area, and should introduce and use appropriate psychological terminology for the content.</i>	
6. Interactions with Students. <i>During the observed instructional content, the instructor should evidence professionalism in their interactions with students, distinct efforts to engage students in the material and draw attention to interesting content, as well as ability to manage questions from students.</i>	
7. Expectations for Demonstration of Higher Order Thinking. <i>Critical thinking in courses involves integration of course content across instructional content and potentially across courses. Instructors will be rated on observed ability to engage students in thinking about the larger concepts in the course and synthesis of the material.</i>	

The goal of creating a standardized feedback rubric for direct observations is to allow consistent feedback to be given to faculty about their teaching. We recognize the importance of academic freedom in the context of professional responsibilities in our role as teachers. Teaching style can vary tremendously, and these are minimum expectations to meet professional standards for faculty in the Department of Psychology. Expectations are consistent with Senate Policy [F12-6](#).

Please support your ratings with comments. Please specify when there are minor or more than minor problems in one of the areas of evaluation.

1. Course Syllabus

<p>1a. Required Syllabus Elements <i>As required by S16-9: San José State University; Course title, number, and section; days and times taught; location of class; Semester and year course is being taught; Professor’s name, office number and location; Professor’s contact information, including as much information as possible and at least one direct way for students to reach the professor; Office hours: location, days and times; Course or section information; Description of the course from the university catalog augmented by section-specific information; Prerequisites; Required and recommended texts, readers, or other reading materials; Any other necessary equipment/materials/fees) Student learning objectives for the course and, if the course is GE, GE area student learning objectives); Course requirements, e.g. papers, projects, exams, quizzes, homework, laboratory work, fieldwork, participation; Course calendar including assignment due dates, exam dates, final exam date and time; Grading information; A statement of how grades will be determined for the course, including +/- grades if they are used; Extra credit options, if available.; List of the percentage weight assigned to various class assignments; Penalty (if any) for late or missed work; Required statement about minimum number of hours student can expect to devote to class activities (lecture, studying, assignments, etc.); . Clearly indicates course points can come from participation (if available) but not from class attendance; Link to University Policies; College, and Department Policy Information, if applicable.</i></p>		
<p>More than minor deviations from requirements set by University policy. Missing or problematic calendar of assignments and due dates. States that course points may be given for attendance (this is not allowed per University policy).</p>	<p>Minor deviations from requirements set by University policy. Some lack of clarity with calendar assignments and due dates. Unclear statement about course points coming from participation but not attendance.</p>	<p>Syllabus is consistent with University Requirements. Calendar is clear with assignments and due dates. Clearly indicates that course points come from participation (if available) but not from class attendance.</p>
<p>COMMENTS:</p>		

1b. Mapping Assignments onto Course Objectives (intentional learning) <i>This mapping is required for GE courses, but is a recommended practice of the Department.</i>		
Most assignments are unrelated to course objectives, or no assignments.	Assignments are implicitly related to course objectives.	Assignments are clearly and explicitly tied to course learning objectives.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
COMMENTS:		
1c. Clarity/Comprehension/Usability		
Syllabus is unclear, not intelligible, or lacks direction to make it usable for the student.	Syllabus has some problems with clarity or ease of use for the student (could include accessibility issues).	Syllabus is clearly laid out, assignments are clearly described; high usability.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
COMMENTS:		

1d. Appropriate Text Materials and ancillaries <i>Focuses on level of presentation, organization, and how up-to-date materials are.</i>		
Text book and/or ancillaries are either at a level inappropriate for the course, are disorganized, or dated.	Text book and/or ancillaries are generally at a level appropriate for the course, are organized, and are up-to- date.	Text book and/or ancillaries clearly related to course objectives, are appropriate to the level of the course, are organized, and are up-to-date.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
COMMENTS:		

2. Canvas/Course Website

Canvas/Course Website <i>Instructors are required to maintain a minimal presence on Canvas which includes: faculty contact information, including office hours; Course syllabus; links to any other learning platforms used in the course, along with login information. [additional statement about encouraging use of Canvas?]</i>		
2a. Canvas Usability <i>Focuses on organization, structure, ease of use, and inclusion of essential course materials (syllabus, assignment due dates, assignments, etc.). If the class does not have a Canvas site, please indicate this in the Comments section.</i>		
Course website offers no real organization, is difficult to navigate, includes multiple inactive or broken links, and/or does not include essential course materials (e.g., due dates, course syllabus). Was not given access to course website.	Some problems with course website with organization, links, or essential course materials. Please specify below.	Course website is organized, easy to navigate, links are active, and includes all essential course materials.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
COMMENTS:		

3. Communication

Clarity of Communication <i>This section is based on the observed and inferred communications of the faculty member pertaining to the observed instructional content described on the cover page of this form.</i>		
3a. Clarity of communication to students		
The communications from the instructor were difficult to follow or comprehend on more than one occasion.	The communications from the instructor were typically clear and easy to follow.	The communications from the instructor were always clear and easy to follow.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
COMMENTS (required): briefly describe the instructional content observed and then your observations [<i>examples</i> : lecture, assignment instructions, handouts, discussion board interactions]		
3b. Organization of presented materials		
Structure of the observed content was unclear or not followed, wasn't sequenced well, or it didn't clearly map onto course objectives.	Structure of the observed content, sequencing of content, and mapping onto course objectives was generally clear.	Observed content was clearly structured, flowed from beginning to end, and mapped onto course objectives.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
COMMENTS (required):		

4. Relevance of Observed Content to Course Description and Objectives

Relevance of observed content given course description and CLOs <i>The assignments and content discussed should be both educationally effective and lead to intentional learning (i.e., correspond to explicit outcomes identified as appropriate for the course)</i>		
4a. Relevance		
Observed content was not related to course description or CLOs, as defined in the syllabus, and/or deviated from the syllabus in presented content.	Observed content was relevant to the stated CLOs, though connection was not explicit or there was a deviation from the syllabus in the presented content.	Observed content was clearly and explicitly related to defined content from the syllabus, including one or more CLOs.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
COMMENTS (required): briefly describe the instructional content observed and then your observations [<i>examples</i> : lecture, videos, module assignment(s)/activities]		

5. Knowledge of Subject Matter

Knowledge of Subject Matter <i>The content discussed/presented during the observation should clearly indicate knowledge or expertise in the area, and should introduce and use appropriate psychological terminology for the content.</i>		
5a. Knowledge		
Instructor's observed content was below expectations for course content or introduction/incorporation of key psychological terms.	Instructor's observed content evidenced some difficulties with knowledge of content or did not consistently introduce/incorporate key psychological terms.	Instructor's observed content clearly evidenced knowledge or expertise in the content area and introduced/incorporated key psychological terminology.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
COMMENTS (required): briefly describe the instructional content observed and then your observations [<i>examples</i> : lecture, module assignment(s)/activities]		

6. Interactions with Students

<p>Interactions with Students <i>During the observed content, the instructor should evidence professionalism in their interactions with students, distinct efforts to engage students in the material and draw attention to interesting content, as well as ability to manage questions from students.</i></p>		
<p>6a. Instructional Environment (depending on course structure, may include the environment during a live session or the environment on Canvas)</p>		
<p>Instructor failed to recognize inappropriate or insensitive interaction, potentially discouraging an environment of mutual respect.</p>	<p>Instructor was mostly appropriate and sensitive to student diversity, but could improve the environment.</p>	<p>Instructor was both appropriate and sensitive to student diversity, creating an atmosphere of mutual respect.</p>
<p>COMMENTS (required):</p> <p>briefly describe the instructional content observed and then your observations [<i>examples</i>: lecture, discussion board, course announcements, updates]</p>		
<p>6b. Student Engagement/Ability of Instructor to Stimulate Interest (may include reference to frequency of student non-class technology use)</p>		
<p>Instructor did not appear to be engaged with students during observed content, or did not clearly state what might be important or interesting about material.</p>	<p>Instructor intermittently engaged students directly, or stated why material may be interesting, though techniques used to stimulate interest were unsuccessful.</p>	<p>Instructor clearly attempted to engage students during observed content, and was at least partly successful.</p>
<p>COMMENTS (required):</p> <p>briefly describe the instructional content observed and then your observations [<i>examples</i>: lecture, discussion board]</p>		
<p>6c. Handling of Questions/Statements</p>		
<p>Instructor did not respond to student questions/statements or was defensive, dismissive, or disrespectful to students.</p>	<p>Instructor handled interactions with students well but not consistently.</p>	<p>Instructor responded effectively to the statements or questions asked.</p>
<p>COMMENTS (required):</p> <p>briefly describe the instructional content observed and then your observations [<i>examples</i>: lecture, discussion board]</p>		

7. Expectations for Demonstration of Higher Order Thinking

Expectations for Demonstration of Higher Order Thinking <i>Critical thinking in courses involves integration of course content across instructional materials and potentially across courses. Instructors will be rated on observed ability to engage students in thinking about the larger concepts in the course and synthesis of the material.</i>		
7a. Expectations for Demonstration of Higher Order Thinking		
Instructor made no attempt to engage students in integration, synthesis, or critical thinking.	Instructor made intermittent attempts to engage students in integration, synthesis, or critical thinking.	Instructor clearly attempted to elicit critical thinking, synthesis of material, and integration across concepts to offer more depth or breadth to the course (this is an expectation of graduate and capstone courses).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
COMMENTS (required): briefly describe the instructional content observed and then your observations [<i>examples</i> : lecture, assignment(s)/activities]		

8. Additional Comments

Please make any additional recommendations, observations, or other comments that you feel are important and not clearly represented in the above rubric. Examples here include: Attributes related to the direct observation not easily captured elsewhere (e.g., lack of responsiveness to appropriate timing re: scheduling of the direct observation) or generalizations from themes identified earlier.

COMMENTS / FEEDBACK:
