

# Facilitating a norming session for peer review

## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

A description of a norming session, and a recommended facilitation process for holding a norming session that prepares faculty to peer review their colleagues’ syllabi, teaching, and other instructional practices.

## HOW DO I USE IT?

Review the facilitation process for a norming session with faculty on peer review of syllabi and teaching. Work through the recommended steps to achieve consensus and prepare faculty to peer-review their colleagues. For assistance, contact CET (cet.usc.edu).

### Norming session

In a norming session, all group members evaluate the same item independently, and then come together to discuss their individual evaluations until reaching consensus on a final evaluation. It is quite common, and a best practice, to use norming sessions with TAs of a course with multiple sections, with groups of instructors who are collaboratively grading assignments, or when creating assignment grading rubrics to be used for multiple sections of the same course. The goal of norming is to ensure that grading of student assignments is consistent across graders and course sections.

This resource refers to a particular type of norming session, one being used for faculty colleagues to achieve consensus on peer review of syllabi and teaching using an evaluation tool, such as the CET Course Design Syllabus Review Checklist or CET Classroom Teaching Observation Checklist. It may also be used to review teaching statements and instructor assessment practices as discussed on the CET website under Peer Review and Evaluation.

### Facilitation process

The following facilitation process can be used to accomplish a norming session on peer review of syllabi or classroom teaching. The same process can be adapted to facilitate other types of norming sessions.

#### **Before the norming session**

* Organizer schedules the meeting, reserves the room (physical or online), and arranges for food and/or beverages if they are being provided.
* Organizer notifies potential faculty participants of the meeting and manages RSVPs if they are being used.
* Organizer provides faculty participants with materials and instructions to independently review the materials with the corresponding checklist/tool, taking notes on their decisions. It is important that all participants review the exact same materials.
  + If reviewing a syllabus, materials will include a sample syllabus provided to all faculty participants, and the evaluation tool, such as the CET Course Design Syllabus Review Checklist.
  + If reviewing teaching, materials will include a video recording of a class, and the evaluation tool, such as the CET Classroom Teaching Observation Checklist.
* Organizer reminds faculty participants of the due date for completing independent evaluations, the importance of bringing their completed evaluation notes to the meeting, and the date/time/location of the meeting.
* Organizer prepares any handouts that will be needed during the norming session, such as copies of the relevant evaluation tool.
* Organizer prepares visual support materials, such as a PowerPoint slide deck if needed.

#### **During the norming session** (also see the list of tips at the end of this resource)

* Faculty bring their notes from their independent evaluations of the syllabus or class recording. (It is highly recommended that their notes are written or typed directly on the evaluation tool, such as directly on the CET Course Design Syllabus Review or CET Classroom Teaching Observation checklists).
* Organizer asks faculty participants to assemble in small groups (about 4 per group).
* Organizer instructs faculty participants to share and compare their independent evaluations in small-group discussion.
* Organizer times and monitors the small-group discussion.
* Organizer calls all faculty participants back together and leads an all-group debrief by calling on a member of each small group to comment on an aspect of the evaluation. This all-group debrief continues until consensus is reached on how each item should be evaluated. It is possible that more than one meeting may be needed for faculty to reach consensus.
* Organizer, or other assigned person, takes notes during this all-group debrief.

#### **After the norming session**

* To close the session, organizer reviews items of consensus.
* Organizer reminds all faculty participants to use consensus results when evaluating future syllabi and teaching.
* Organizer consolidates session notes on the evaluation tool, such as the CET Course Design Syllabus Review and/or CET Classroom Teaching Observation checklists, and emails consensus results to all faculty.
* It may be helpful for improving future norming sessions to distribute an anonymous evaluation survey to participants of the norming session.
* Faculty begin peer review; they use the evaluation tool, such as the CET checklists, to review their colleagues’ syllabi and teaching.
* Faculty may need to hold future re-norming sessions if there are changes made to the evaluation tools or peer evaluation requirements that warrant it.

### Tips for leading norming sessions

#### **Be a role model.**

* Identify the base principles and purpose of the tool being normed.
  + For a faculty evaluation checklist: recognizing excellence in teaching, promoting best practices, supporting the Dean’s evaluation decisions with faculty input.
* Identify the consensus “rules.”
  + Consistency in evaluation processes is critical.
  + All voices must be heard. Collegiality is essential.
  + The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few, or the one.
  + It’s okay to “disagree and commit.” Sometimes, individuals will need to go along with the majority.
* Demonstrate how to explain the reasoning behind a decision. State an option, then give reasons for the decision based on principles and/or data.
* Stay in the facilitator role; resist becoming a decision-maker. While taking the role of facilitator, one relinquishes their personal opinion.

#### **Take the temperature of the group before opening discussion.**

* Identify the most popular options.
* Get a general measure of the level of agreement/disagreement on the options.

#### **Discuss and reconcile options.**

* Avoid addressing disagreement based on personality, past history with one another, or other factors that have nothing to do with the options. These cannot be resolved in the norming session.
* First establish points of agreement.
* Then establish points of disagreement.
* Establish strengths and weaknesses of options. Ask opponents of options to come up with the strengths. Then, ask supporters to come up with the weaknesses.
* Explore alternative options or compromises.

#### **Establish the decision.**

* State explicitly the option that has been selected.
* Record the selected option.
* Distribute the record of decisions to all stakeholders.