

NACEP **ISSUE BRIEF**

THE CLASSROOM VISIT

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NACEP ISSUE BRIEF THE CLASSROOM VISIT

FOCUS: The classroom visit, integral to NACEP's Standard C3, provides Faculty Liaisons with the opportunity to observe first-hand how Concurrent Enrollment Instructors share course content and how students understand that content. In addition, classroom visits give Faculty Liaisons insight into student interactions with one another and with the Concurrent Enrollment Instructor, as well as how closely that interaction mirrors what happens in the college classroom. For these reasons classroom visits are an important part of the Faculty Liaisons' work, meant to ensure that Concurrent Enrollment students are getting an education equal to that of their college counterparts.

But what should Faculty Liaisons look for during the classroom visit to find evidence of rigor, student learning, and equivalency to the campus course? And how can the classroom visit serve its other important purpose, that of building and developing the relationship between the Faculty Liaison and the Concurrent Enrollment Instructor? This guide provides a framework and resources to answer those questions, with the goal of helping Faculty Liaisons make the most of their classroom visits.

SECTION 1

NACEP STANDARDS REGARDING CLASSROOM VISITS

NACEP Accreditation Standards require site visits to be completed by a Faculty Liaison. The term Faculty Liaison (FL) refers to a college/university faculty member who provides discipline-specific initial training and annual professional development for, as well as visits the classes of, Concurrent Enrollment Instructors (CEIs). During those visits, the FL is to observe the course content and delivery, student discourse, and rapport to ensure Concurrent Enrollment (CE) courses are equivalent to the courses offered on-campus. NACEP Curriculum Standard 3 also requires that a site visit report is submitted as evidence. The Accreditation Commission states that ideal site visit reports might include:

- the extent to which the CE syllabus and content represent the on-campus course;
- impressions of student interest and involvement;
- whether student assignments demonstrate rigor and depth equivalent to the on-campus course;
- how the CEI's evaluation of student work compares to on-campus evaluation;
- comments offered by students;
- recommendations for moving forward.

The NACEP Accreditation Commission recommends making the most of a site visit, especially for programs that visit less than once a year. The site visit observation allows FLs the opportunity both to validate that the college's expectations for the course are being met and to continue to strengthen collegial collaboration. Some of the information that might be gathered and discussed during a site visit include:

- reviewing the syllabus, graded assessments, and grade norming;
- discussing discipline specific updates;
- updating any departmental changes that might affect the course.

The Faculty Liaison is to observe the course content and delivery, student discourse, and rapport to ensure Concurrent Enrollment courses are equivalent to the courses offered on-campus.



SECTION 2

NUTS & BOLTS: THE BEFORE, DURING, & AFTER OF THE VISIT

The classroom visit is one of the most important aspects of the FL role. It not only helps to ensure that course content is being delivered at the level required by the credit-granting institution, it also serves as an important outreach tool to both instructors and students. As such, it is recommended that the visit be conducted in three parts, not just one: 1) the conversation before the visit; 2) the observations during the visit; and 3) the feedback after the visit.

BEFORE

The FL should reach out to the CEI before visiting the class to set expectations on both sides. During this conversation, the FL should:

- **Ask questions about what to anticipate during the class session. It would be helpful to know:**
 - ▶ the goal of the class session (e.g. what does the CEI want students to learn?);
 - ▶ what was taught in the previous class(es) that helped prepare students for this particular session;
 - ▶ what activities are planned in order to meet the day's learning goal(s) (e.g. what will students do in class to gain the desired knowledge?);
 - ▶ how the CEI will assess whether or not the teaching methods helped students meet the learning goal(s) while maintaining rigor;
 - ▶ what feedback would be helpful to the CEI;
 - ▶ what additional support the CEI needs or what questions the CEI may have.
- **Ask the CEI for materials that may be necessary for review prior to the visit, including:**
 - ▶ the CE course syllabus;
 - ▶ copies of graded assessments.
- **Other logistics to discuss include:**
 - ▶ the best date and time for the visit;
 - ▶ how the FL might engage with the CEI and students during the visit;
 - ▶ if there will be time to share feedback with the CEI after the class session.

DURING

During the class visit, there are many elements to observe and think about, so it's good to plan ahead. Use the pre-visit communication with the CEI to help focus comments and observations. If this is a return visit, it is important to look for changes based on previous feedback.

Many CE programs have standard forms for collecting and documenting observation notes taken during site visits. If such a form is available, it could be filled out during the visit, or notes could be taken during the visit and then transcribed onto the form once the FL has had a chance to mentally process what was observed. Some FLs find it helpful to keep a running log of what the teacher is doing, and what the students are doing. Keep in mind that

a site visit is not just about observing what the CEI does; it is also about observing how the students react to the CEI's instruction. Christine Denecker, Faculty Liaison for English at the University of Findlay, suggests "watching the students, and in particular their body language, to see when they are engaged, when they are confused and when they lose interest. In my notes, I jot down the time and then record what the teacher is doing and what the students are doing. This also allows me to provide feedback on pacing to the teacher as well as point out times when the teacher 'loses' the students or has the students' interest."

The following is a list of potential indicators that the instructor is engaging the students, and that the content and level of the course is in line with college-level expectations. It may not be possible to assess everything on this list during one classroom visit, so use these suggestions as appropriate. In addition, it may be helpful to review this list with the CEI prior to the visit to determine which aspects of feedback would be most useful. ¹

- **Were the students engaged? Indicators are that the instructor:**

- ▶ integrated a variety of active learning strategies, as appropriate to the goals of the class meeting;
- ▶ required student thought and participation;
- ▶ tailored the course to help diverse learners;
- ▶ recognized when students did not understand;
- ▶ created an environment conducive to learning;
- ▶ was flexible and adapted the lesson when presented with an unexpected question/situation.

- **Were students demonstrating their knowledge of the content?**

Indicators are that:

- ▶ the instructor used formative assessment methods to determine what students understood/could do during the class session;
- ▶ the instructor provided appropriate feedback to students during activities;
- ▶ students seemed to have the necessary background to understand the material presented in the lesson;
- ▶ students were actively and purposefully participating in class discussions/activities;
- ▶ students' answers to questions/participation in activities demonstrated that they understood course content;
- ▶ students demonstrated that they were appropriately challenged by course content/activities;
- ▶ students asked relevant and probing questions based on course material.

- **Was the content covered equal to college classroom rigor? Indicators are that:**

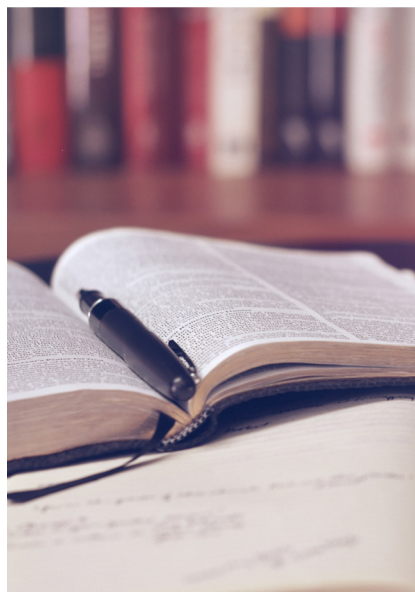
- ▶ an appropriate amount of material was covered given the time allotted;
- ▶ new terms, concepts, and principles were correctly and fully defined;
- ▶ the instructor used alternate explanations when necessary;
- ▶ the instructor provided clear examples to clarify abstract and/or difficult ideas;
- ▶ the instructor explicitly communicated the relationships among various ideas;
- ▶ the instructor periodically summarized the most important ideas;
- ▶ the instructor demonstrated knowledge of the field.

¹ Boise State Center for Teaching and Learning. *Classroom Observation Checklist*.



**“Watch students, and in particular,
their body language to see when they
are engaged, see where they are
confused, see where they lose
interest.”**

*Christine Denecker, Faculty Liaison,
University of Findlay*



- **Was the class session well-organized? Indicators are that the instructor:**
 - ▶ gave clear instructions for class activities;
 - ▶ provided students sufficient (enough but not too much) time to complete activities;
 - ▶ arranged and discussed the content in a systematic and organized fashion;
 - ▶ did not digress often from the main topic;
 - ▶ related the day's material to past/upcoming class sessions.

AFTER

The FL should consider carefully the best way to share feedback from the observation with the CEI. Ideally, the FL and CEI should meet immediately after the class session, and the CEI should share their reflection on the class session first. At this point, the FL should listen and serve as a “mirror” to the CEI, summarizing what the CEI says. The CEI might also be prompted to explain what went well during the class session and what changes might be made when the lesson is taught in the future (and why).

Once the CEI has finished reflecting on the class, the FL should provide observational comments and suggestions based on the goals discussed in the pre-meeting. FLs should be sure to:

- start with the positive;
- remind the CEI that the feedback offered is solely based on aligning the CE and the college course and not a reflection of instructional abilities;
- provide honest, clear feedback related to the stated goals for the session;
- always put comments in context of the college classroom (i.e., “We have found that students learn these concepts well in the college class when we do X. Maybe try that approach?”);
- address any content issues promptly.

Since teaching schedules don't always allow for a meeting immediately after the observation, FLs can consider conducting the follow-up meeting at a later time in person or via a virtual meeting platform (such as Skype, Zoom or Google Hangouts) so that CEI reflection and FL feedback can be shared in a conversational manner. If it is only possible to share reflection and feedback in writing, make sure comments are thorough, clear, and written in a supportive tone.

If the feedback is all or mostly positive, the follow-up conversation will likely be collegial. However, if the feedback includes suggestions for changes to content and/or pedagogy — particularly if the CEI is a seasoned instructor — then the conversation might be a bit more challenging. In these cases, the FL can use the following steps (based on the A.C.T.I.O.N. framework ²) to help guide that feedback:

- **Ask clarifying questions to assist with understanding intentions.**
 - ▶ “I want to make sure I understand why [teaching approach X] won't work in this classroom. Is it because...”
- **Come from curiosity not judgment.**
 - ▶ Actively and openly listen to what the CEI has to say in response to the feedback.

² Souza, T. J. (2018). *Responding to Microaggressions in the Classroom: Taking A.C.T.I.O.N.* Online article in *Faculty Focus Premium*. Madison, WI: Magna Publication.



“Classroom visits provide all those involved—students, teachers, and professors—with the connection that facilitates academic discourse and learning from each other.”

*Michelle Lane, Concurrent Enrollment Instructor,
Benjamin Logan High School (Ohio)*



- **Tell them the reason for the feedback in a factual manner.**
 - ▶ “In order to align with the college course, the assessments must be no more than 50% multiple choice.”
 - ▶ “We expect students to be able to do this kind of writing for a college course. How can I support that change in instruction in this class?”
- **Impact exploration.**
 - ▶ “If these changes aren’t possible, how else might we ensure that students are meeting the learning outcomes for the course?”
 - ▶ “[X approach] is important in order to ensure that students are working at the same level as those on campus. What do you think will be the impact on your students who go on to take the next course in college?”
- **Own Your Thoughts and Feelings.**
 - ▶ “I am so grateful for your openness to discussing how to support student learning, and am hopeful that we can make changes that work for all of us.”
 - ▶ “I understand that making changes is challenging, but am confident that I can support you as you try out these new approaches in your class.”
- **Next Steps: Request appropriate action be taken.**
 - ▶ “Let’s schedule another classroom visit later in the semester, during which [X change] will be the goal.”
 - ▶ “Please submit a revised syllabus by [X date] so that we can ensure that the learning goals are aligned with the college course.”

If the CEI does not make the changes suggested by the FL, or if the feedback is not well-received, the FL should reach out to the CE program director (or other appropriate administrator) for guidance and support. If needed, the FL can begin the steps to officially document the CEI’s non-compliance.

SUMMARY

If FLs follow all three of the steps of the classroom visit, they will not only have done important work to ensure that CE students are engaged in rigorous, college-level work, but they will also strengthen the relationship between the CE program, the CEIs, and the students.

SECTION 3

INSIGHTS FROM FACULTY LIAISONS

- On looking for evidence of rigor: “I’m looking at the students’ responses as indication of rigor. I’m looking for the instructor to challenge the students with thought-provoking questions and activities. When I observe a classroom, I hope that the students talk more than the teacher does. When the teacher talks, I only know what the teacher knows. When the students talk, then I can really tell if they are grasping the instruction and are being held accountable at a high level.” – *Christine Denecker, University of Findlay*
- On using the classroom visit to connect to CE students: “During the site visit, I typically spend time working with the students instead of observing the ‘regular classroom’. I do this to help students feel a bond with SMSU and also to check if they understand/are following the basic set-up of the course. I go over the main assignments and ask about the textbook. I answer questions and clarify areas of concern. Visits also create an opportunity for me to teach something the teacher may be struggling with.” – *Ben Walker, Southwest Minnesota State University*
- On effectively taking notes during the classroom visit: “From a practical standpoint the most success I have had is when I am able to take a laptop, have my evaluation document pulled up and type my responses right into the document as I’m sitting in the classroom. This might seem like a logistical no-brainer but I have also just taken notes and tried to write the evaluation later. Both methods get the job done but being able to write the document as I’m sitting in the classroom speeds up the feedback to the instructor and lessens my workload considerably, plus I’m able to document my experience in a real-time way.” – *Carissa Wilcox, Boise State University*

SECTION 4

INSIGHTS FROM CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT INSTRUCTORS

- “While I engage with my colleagues in the high school on a daily basis who are constantly in the high school culture, the site visits have been great opportunities to keep me connected with my colleagues and the culture at the university.” – *Jamie Erford, Bluffton High School (Ohio)*
- “Classroom visits provide all those involved — students, teachers, and professors — with the connection that facilitates academic discourse and learning from each other.” – *Michelle Lane, Benjamin Logan High School (Ohio)*
- “Receiving feedback from my Faculty Liaison has helped my efforts to properly prepare students for the full-time university experience. However, much more rewarding is viewing the interaction between students and Liaisons. When a university professor comes to class and praises them for their discussions and the quality of their work, students are genuinely empowered and their sense of succeeding in college is palpable.” – *Brendan Earle, Idaho Fine Arts Academy (Idaho)*



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CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT



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