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Teaching Evaluations by Faculty Colleagues

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Teaching evaluations by faculty colleagues

At my institution, the evaluation process for each retention, tenure, and promotion decision includes class visits by other faculty members to observe the candidate's teaching. I imagine this is standard procedure everywhere. I have experienced this once already (my retention review) and before long will experience it again (tenure review). This is an important and valuable part of the review process. It would be inappropriate to leave evaluation of teaching solely up to students. (Equally, I think it would be wrong to leave student evaluations out. A complete picture incorporates both. And it might incorporate other information as well. I wonder whether any schools attempt to use outcome measures of student success linked to individual instructors?)

The in-class observations are a bit awkward, probably unavoidably so. For one thing, there is the consciousness of being evaluated in person, which most people don't especially enjoy, though of course it goes with the territory. It also makes me wonder what the students think, if they notice there are observers. ("Why are they keeping an eye on this guy?") I suppose I could just tell the students to expect visitors and why. But apart from this inherent mild awkwardness, the visits themselves have been fine, in my (limited) experience. In conversations with people at various law schools, I have heard some stories about visits that don't go so well - as when the visitor starts stumping the instructor with questions. One suspects some of these are apocryphal. But if you have a story that will keep junior profs up at night from now until tenure, feel free to share.

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