Name of Guidelines	Peer Observation and Review of Teaching (PORT)
Description of Guidelines	To provide Guidelines for the use of Peer Observation and Review of Teaching at ACU
Guidelines apply to	All academic staff using PORT
Responsible officer	Director, ACU Learning and Teaching Centre
Date	July 2015
Version	2.0

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## 1.	Application of Guidelines

These Guidelines govern the use of Peer Observation and Review (PORT) of Teaching at ACU and apply to all staff participating in PORT.

## 2.	Guidelines Statement

Academic staff are encouraged to participate in reflective teaching practices through the ACU Peer Observation and Review of Teaching (PORT) program. PORT is a voluntary program at ACU and cannot be mandated without approval of the academic staff wishing to participate in the program. Peer observation is designed to be developmental for staff while peer review is designed to be evaluative for staff. Staff will nominate which of observation or review they wish to utilise.

## 3.	Purpose of Guidelines

These Guidelines have been developed to ensure that academic staff who wish to participate in PORT have a suggested process and supporting resources and materials for successful implementation of the program.

## 4.	Roles and Responsibilities

The Director of ACU's Learning and Teaching Centre (LTC) will be responsible for the housing and maintenance of resources and materials for PORT. Faculties and other organisational units delivering academic programs will be responsible for the management of PORT in their own respective operational area.

## 5.	What is PORT?

Peer observation & review of teaching (PORT) is a mechanism whereby our peers can observe and constructively comment on some functional or qualitative aspect of the teaching we undertake and the learning we promote for the benefit of student learning. PORT is about the promotion of collegial working practices, the dissemination of excellent teaching practices, the development of the individual, quality enhancement, and improving the quality of student learning. All staff should be committed to maintaining and enhancing the quality of learning and teaching. PORT provides a structured framework for the ongoing improvement of teaching and learning practices through peer collaboration, discussion and the dissemination of ideas and good practice. In this sense, observation is a very valuable tool for both the observed and the observer as it involves the sharing of excellence and promotes a greater sense of collegiality and good practice. The process operates in the spirit of impartiality, professionalism, and peer support with the aim of enhancing practice for both the observed and the observer and therefore the learning experience of students.

The ACU PORT program should support staff to:

- voluntarily participate;

- develop self-awareness;

- reflect on their teaching practices;

- enhance their awareness of the student learning experience;

- recognise and identify good practice in others;

- identify further professional development needs;

- identify and promote good practice and innovation in learning and teaching;

- deepen the understanding of the work of colleagues in and across PORT teams;

- provide evidence of quality teaching practice for promotion applications, professional development recognition and the like.

Peer "observation" is distinguished from "review" in ACU's PORT program, the former being developmental in nature (commonly used professionally develop staff in learning and teaching and to create a community of practice among academic colleagues) while the latter being evaluative in nature (commonly used as evidence for: teaching awards; promotion; and, recruitment). ACU's PORT program is not a review or an appraisal unless the observed wants it to be. It is about viewing our teaching practices as a continual process of improvement which might be thought of as being informed by ourselves, our peers, our students, and the literature. PORT is conducted with mutual trust and respect and any detailed documents should remain the property of the observed unless the observed colleague gives their explicit agreement that such documents may be shared.

6.   Who is your peer?

The answer to this question may well depend on the type of observation undertaken. A subject specialist will need to act as an observer if you wish to have the substance of your teaching peer observed. If you are having your assessment regime peer observed for alignment with intended learning outcomes then someone outside of your discipline, say for example from ACU's Learning & Teaching Centre, may be appropriate. You are best placed to ascertain an appropriate observer. However, you may wish to consider the following issues in coming to a decision about who you would like to observe your teaching:

- It is generally unwise to have your supervisor as your observer as this may move the process from observation to review without the necessary intention of either party;

- Consider who would be best placed to provide you with objective feedback and suggestions for areas of improvement. For example a professional colleague who is also a personal friend may not feel comfortable to be open and frank about areas for improvement and this could impede the peer observation process. The aim is to get objective feedback and suggestions on areas for improvement in your chosen area of observation and sometimes a close personal friendship can compromise achieving this aim;

- Consider the junior or senior status of an observer. Some people feel self-conscious about a senior colleague observing their teaching particularly if that colleague is involved in the management of the Department, School or Faculty. While the process is confidential, you do not want to feel too uncomfortable during the observation as this will not assist the process. Conversely, a junior colleague may not have the experience and understanding of best practice teaching to assist you in seeking objective feedback on your teaching;

- Depending on the type of observation (ie not as to the substance of the subject you are teaching), do not be concerned about whether the observer has disciplinary expertise. Research shows that a peer outside your discipline is not detrimental to the PORT process and can often provide refreshing insights. Go for expertise in the area of teaching and learning you wish to have observed;

- Select someone you are comfortable with and who has good knowledge of teaching and learning in or outside of your discipline field (depending on the type of observation undertaken) and whose opinion you respect.

- Your Associate Dean Learning and Teaching (ADL&T) or ACU's Learning and Teaching Centre can help advise you on the selection of an appropriate observer.

7. The Purpose of PORT

The purpose of PORT is to:

- Improve the quality of our teaching practices.

- Improve the quality of student learning

- Increase the sense of collaboration and enhanced trust through allowing colleagues to observe and comment upon each other's teaching.

- Increase awareness of what is being taught and learned and how it is being taught and learned.

- Obtain good ideas from the practice of others.

- Affirm and/or challenge our own teaching practices.

- Encourage discussion and dissemination of good practice.

- Address practical issues such as suitability of facilities.

- Maintain and enhance a quality learning experience.

8. Guidelines as to the use of PORT

8.1 Resources and materials
The LTC will house all PORT materials and resources and will update said materials and resources as it sees fit.

Faculties and organisational units delivering academic programs may adapt the materials and resources held by the LTC for use in their own faculty or operational area but must do so by ensuring such adaptation is faithful and consistent with the purpose of PORT.

8.2   Running PORT

Faculties and organisational units delivering academic programs will manage the delivery of PORT by the creation of cohorts of academic staff to participate in PORT and the delivery of the PORT program to those staff who volunteer to participate in it.

Faculties and organisational units delivering academic programs will use their best endeavours to ensure that the desired structure of PORT meets the needs of the academic staff participating in it. Notwithstanding this, Faculties and other organisational units will implement PORT within their budget parameters and organisational abilities.

PORT teams will be constructed by the Faculty and operational area delivering academic programs according to the wishes of the participants using either the "buddy system" or the "three ringed circus system".

The 'buddy system' operates where two colleagues agree to act as observed and observer. The observation takes place followed by a reversal of the roles at a subsequent date. Each colleague is observed only once as indicated by the diagram below.

The 'three ringed circus system' operates where colleague A observes colleague B, colleague B observes C, and so on around the team until all have been observed. A recommended approach is observation organised within teams of three as in the diagram on the right. Each colleague is observed twice (perhaps reversing the cycle). A derivation of this approach involves two colleagues attending each observation. Again, it is up to the observed as to whether there is one or two peers conducting the observation. Exceptionally, colleagues may wish to utilise the services of an external observer or team of observers. Any other system of peer observation may be designed and adopted by faculties or individual teams (in consultation with their respective AD L & T), so long as it meets the basic requirements set out in this document and the Participant Manual (both documents available on the ACU LTC web site).

Buddy System

Three Ringed Circus System
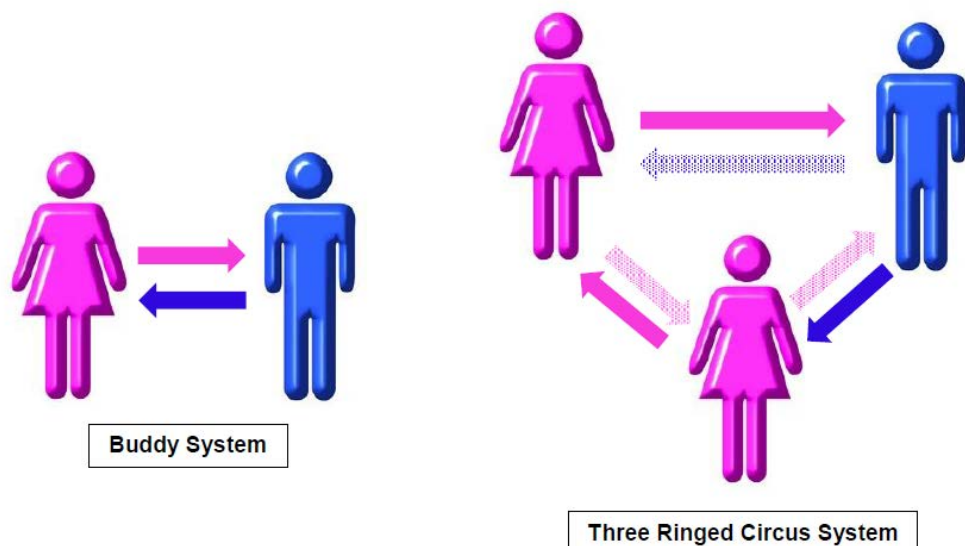
Participants will determine if they wish to be observed or reviewed and whether the observation or review will be made by a peer that is internal to ACU or external to ACU.

The LTC will act as a resource consultant to the faculties and organisational units delivering PORT by advising on implementation issues and providing support where appropriate to assist implementation.

8.3   Reporting on PORT

Faculties and other organisational units delivering academic programs will briefly report to the LTC on the uptake of PORT in its respective unit. This report should not mention the names of academic staff participating in PORT rather, should speak in general terms about the numbers of academic staff participating in PORT and the outcomes reached from the program. It should report on the number of academic staff participating in observation as opposed to review and the use of internal versus external peers. Further, the report should provide a summary of the evaluation process each time PORT is run in a faculty or organisational unit.

8.4   Evaluating PORT

Each faculty and organisational unit delivering academic programs should evaluate each cohort of academic staff participating in PORT. Evaluations do not have to be lengthy or complex but should seek to gain an understanding of the value or otherwise of the PORT program to each participating staff member. An evaluation should give participants the opportunity to answer qualitative and quantitative questions. Further, it should ask participants to explain what they are going to do with their PORT observation or review data.

9.   How PORT can be used

9.1   Reflective teaching practices

The primary purpose of PORT is for teaching staff to be able to reflect on their teaching practices and through that reflection to make improvements in teaching that benefit student learning. It is generally regarded that a process of peer observation that provides constructive feedback to teachers assists the process of reflection. Other feedback that assists reflection could be: student surveys; subject and course success rates; assessment moderation; and, other interactions with the learners who are the subject of your teaching. Such reflection leads to improvements being initiated. PORT is most valuable to initiate this process but to also check that improvements have had the desired effect. In other words a second round of PORT can be valuable as a method of checking whether improvements initiated by a first round of PORT (or other feedback) have worked.

9.2 People Management Practices including Probation, Promotion and Performance Review and Planning

Academic staff members with Teaching as component to their Academic Career Pathway are required to provide evidence that demonstrates how reflective practice informs teaching, curriculum development and assessment in the above processes that impact on career development, planning and progression. Evidence of involvement in the PORT Program can assist this by demonstrating engagement in ongoing continuous improvement through reflecting on feedback received, incorporating changes where appropriate and measuring the outcome of the review process.

9.3 Teaching awards

ACU makes two types of teaching awards namely, the Vice Chancellor's Teaching Excellence Award and ACU Citations for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning. The former specifies the requirement for the endorsement of senior staff in your Faculty and prefers if applicants have institutional and external recognition of teaching excellence. The latter refers to assessment criteria that evidences advanced skills in evaluation and reflective practice. PORT can assist in providing evidence to satisfy selection criteria for ACU teaching awards.

Prior to the closure of the federal government's Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT), numerous teaching awards were made annually. The OLT Awards for Teaching Excellence included, among other suggestions, the assessment criteria of evaluation practices that bring about improvements in teaching and learning by showing advanced skills in evaluation and reflective practice; using a variety of evaluation strategies to bring about change. Again, PORT can assist in providing evidence to support the selection criteria for successful teaching award applications.