APPENDIX G5

STANDARDIZED OPTIONS FOR SOLICITING STUDENT INPUT DURING FORMAL OBSERVATION OF FULL-TIME TEACHING FACULTY

It is extremely important that the person being evaluated understand all options for gathering information from students.

During the pre-observation conference, the evaluator and instructor will discuss these information solicitation techniques to ensure that the instructor has an explicit understanding of each. Although there are strengths and weaknesses to each of these methods, it is important to note that each is a valid option for the instructor. The final decision of which technique used will be up to the evaluatee. The instructor will leave the room on options 1, 2 and 4.

Under each of these options, the instructor turns the class over to the evaluator. The evaluator then explains that the purpose of the observation is to provide the instructor with specific feedback regarding his or her teaching performance. The evaluator will provide positive reinforcement regarding effective performance and note any problem areas and make suggestions for improvement.

The evaluator should inform students that the teacher evaluation (including a classroom observation) is part of Butte College's standard personnel process. New full-time teaching faculty are evaluated several times during their first four years and then at least once every three years.

The evaluator must assure students of the confidentiality of the process. While a summary of the students' comments will be shared immediately with the instructor, individual student comments will not be identified by the evaluator and should not be communicated to the instructor by other students. (Any students with tape recorders should be asked at this time to turn them off both prior to and during the evaluation.)

Evaluators should note the importance of neutral body language and tone of voice when conducting any of the following processes. Students should be informed by the evaluator that he or she does not want to influence their responses and will be making every effort not to bias their input in any way. This should be communicated to the students before proceeding with any of the following five options, as selected by the person being evaluated:

1. The evaluator asks the following questions of the group, making sure to ask for a show of hands whenever there appears to be anything less than consensus:
   a. "Today class was shortened due to the need to collect your feedback. Other than that, was the class session fairly typical of how class is normally conducted? (If “no”, how was it different?) (If not, it may be important to come back for another observation at another time.)
   b. "On the average (through the semester up to now), approximately how many hours per week do you spend outside this class on class-related activities? (Students will come up with various figures, but it is possible to achieve consensus fairly quickly. This is valuable information for the instructor who may then want to either raise or lower requirements and/or expectations, but this question is optional.)
   c. "What do you particularly like about this instructor--what makes him or her especially effective?"
   d. "What, if anything, could she or he do to become even more effective?" (It is essential that this question not be asked with a negative slant!)

   The evaluator should write students' comments on the board (which, of course, must be thoroughly erased before leaving the room) and, in the interest of time, ask a student or employee designee to copy the comments on a piece of paper. The evaluator should save this record (via written transcript) of the students' comments.

2. The same questions are asked as with Option #1, but the class is divided into smaller discussion groups. A spokesperson for each group then reports back to the evaluator and comments are written on the board. The entire class then "votes" as to whether or not they agree with each comment. As above, a student should be asked to copy this information as a permanent record.
The advantage of this variation to Option #1 is that it works well for especially large classes or classes which have many students who are not otherwise likely to express an opinion. The disadvantage is that it takes nearly twice as long as Option #1—from 20 to 30 minutes.

3. Ask the same questions as above, but have students write their responses on a sheet of paper, on 3x5 cards, or on a sheet of paper with the question stated. This method removes any doubt as to whether or not the evaluator is "slanting" the questions or pursuing negative feedback since the actual written comments can be returned to the instructor (but only at the end of the semester, after grades are posted!) for his or her perusal. Another advantage is that feedback is received from all the students—not merely the more vocal ones.

A potential disadvantage of this technique is that the evaluator must write a summary of the students' written comments long before the actual written comments can be provided to the instructor, thereby possibly distorting or reducing the validity of the immediate feedback. Another disadvantage is that students will not have the opportunity of hearing what other students have to say. (Having students engage one another when there is disagreement about an instructor can be a very beneficial thing for the dynamics of the class if handled appropriately by the evaluator.)

4. Follow the procedures described in Option #1 or Option #2. As a final step, summarize the instructor's perceived strengths and the suggestions for improvement; then distribute a questionnaire to the students in order to validate the process. The questionnaire would include the following:

"How accurately has the instructor's performance been described?

Please check the appropriate response:

___ Instructor is more effective than has been described.
___ Instructor's performance has been accurately described.
___ Instructor is less effective than has been described.

Please Comment:"

These brief questionnaires should be saved and provided to the instructor by the Dean.

The advantage of this option is that both the evaluator and the instructor will know to what extent students agree with what fellow students have said and how accurately the evaluator has summarized that feedback. Students who have not spoken up have an opportunity to reinforce what has been said or register any alternative feelings. The main disadvantage is that it further lengthens the time needed for the evaluation process.

5. The evaluator may use Butte College's standard Student Feedback Form to gather input from students about the instructor's effectiveness. The evaluator distributes the questionnaires and computer input (scantron) sheets, then encourages the students to be as descriptive and specific as possible. Students turn in both the questionnaires and computer input sheets directly to the evaluator, who then leaves without further discussion with the students.

Prior to writing the narrative to the formal evaluation, the evaluator has the area office process the student feedback and also summarizes the students' responses, noting where there was widespread agreement as to an instructor's strengths or weaknesses. Of course the actual feedback forms and computer-generated report may not be given to the instructor until final grades are posted.
A summary of student responses should always be included as part of the evaluator's narrative, regardless of which of the above options was used. Ultimately, the effectiveness of any of these options is largely dependent on the level of trust that exists between the instructor and the evaluator. An effective pre-observation conference can do much to establish that trust, but whenever an obvious problem exists, it is undoubtedly best to arrange for someone else to carry out the evaluation. Either the evaluator or the instructor may request to the Chief Instruction Officer that another individual be scheduled to conduct the evaluation.