

# Teaching Squares

## Handbook for Participants

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# Teaching Squares



## *A Note to Participants:*

*Thank you so much for joining the Teaching Squares Project. We honor your willingness to open your classroom and share your expertise as a teacher with us. We hope that through this process of observation and shared reflection, you will experience - as we have experienced – a renewed enthusiasm for teaching and an increased appreciation of the excellent work of our colleagues.*

*Special thanks to those of you who are returning to the Project as a Square Leader. Your enthusiasm and commitment are an integral part of the continuing success of Teaching Squares.*

# Teaching Squares

## What is Teaching Squares?

*The **Teaching Squares** Project attempts to improve teaching and build community through a structured, non-evaluative process of classroom observation and shared reflection.*

*A **Teaching Square** consists of four faculty participants (ideally from different disciplines) who:*

- *Observe at least one class taught by each Square Partner (a total of 3 observations)*
- *Reflect on the class observation experience*
- *Share reflections with Square Partners*
- *Share Square observations with Project participants as a whole*

***Your Teaching Squares experience offers you the opportunity to improve your own teaching by observing your Square Partners in an actual classroom situation.***

*By participating in the Teaching Squares Project you will have an opportunity to:*

- *observe, analyze and celebrate good teaching*
- *increase your understanding of and appreciation for the work of colleagues*
- *experience the joy and confusion of being a student*
- *formulate a plan for enhancing your own teaching based on the your observations and reflections and the shared reflections of your Square Partners.*

# Teaching Squares

## Cornerstones for Participants

*Teaching Squares is unique in offering a classroom visitation process **free from evaluation.***

*The Cornerstones of Teaching Squares are those critical attitudes and behaviors that, when exhibited by all participants, create a safe, mutually-supportive, energizing environment for sharing the joys and challenges of teaching.*

Reciprocity and Shared Responsibility	Appreciation
Self Referential Reflection	Mutual Respect

# Teaching Squares

## ***Reciprocity and Shared Responsibility***

*Through the mutual exchange of visits with our Teaching Squares partners, we assume the dual roles of the observer and the observed, teacher and student. We simultaneously experience and thus share the opportunities and risks of inviting others into our classrooms.*

*As Teaching Squares participants we jointly assume the tasks of arranging classroom visits and exchanging course information. By fully participating in the organization and administration of the Square we minimize the effort that must be expended by any single participant. Our self-leadership maintains a climate of collegiality. This structure facilitates a team effort and a team result.*

## ***Self-Referential Reflection***

*The Square Share is an opportunity to report what **we** have learned from the observation experience. It is **NOT** an opportunity to improve a Square Partner's teaching. By keeping our observations self-focused we avoid any hint of evaluation or judgment that could contribute to a climate of defensiveness and suspicion.*

## ***Appreciation***

*The Square Share reflection session is an opportunity to identify and celebrate the behaviors and practices that create a productive environment for learning. Expressing observations in a positive way offers us a goal to be pursued and a source of energy for achieving that goal.*

## ***Mutual Respect***

*We enter our Square Partners' classroom with an attitude of empathy and respect for both the instructor and the students, recognizing that different methods and techniques are required in different disciplines and classroom situation.*

# Teaching Squares

## Project Timeline

*The Teaching Squares project extends over a period of several weeks. This schedule was established to allow you to complete all assigned tasks with a minimal disruption to your normal schedule. If you follow the suggested schedule, participating in the project should require about **one hour per week** of your time.*

<i>Week</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Your Task</i>
<i>Week 1</i>	All Squares Kick-off Square organization	Meet your Square partners Establish Square operating agreements
<i>Week 2</i>	Class visit 1	Arrange visit to Square partner Organize materials for visiting partner
<i>Week 3</i>	Class visit 2	Visit Record observations
<i>Week 4</i>	Class visit 3	
<i>Week 5</i>	Reflection	Analyze observations Prepare for your Square Share
<i>Week 6</i>	Square Share	Share personal, positive observations with Square Partners
<i>Week 7</i>	All Squares Celebration	Share Square observations

# Teaching Squares

## All Squares Kickoff

### Agenda

#### I. “Square Dance”

*Locate your Square Partners*

#### II. Introductions

*This is our opportunity to meet all participants Teaching Squares project. We will not be all together again until the All Squares Celebration.*

#### III. Welcome to Teaching Squares

*Meet the Teaching Squares Project manager and review your Teaching Squares handbook.*



## Square Organizational Meeting

### Agenda

*Each Square can set its own rules for operating. We have included our suggestions for operating based on our previous experience, understanding that these suggestions may or may not work for your Square.*

*You and your Square Partners will need to determine the:*

#### 1. Amount of notice required for a visit

*Since the purpose of Teaching Squares is to observe your Square Partners in their “natural” state, we found that 24 hours notice was generally sufficient. A bit more notice guarantees that your Square Partner can return your call and confirm your visit.*

#### 2. Role of the visiting instructor

*The urge to participate in the class activities is nearly irresistible. It is entirely too easy to be swept up into the joy of being a student again and to forget that the purpose of the class visit is to observe your Square Partner’s work. We found that we could best fulfill our Teaching Squares goal by restricting our role to that of an observer. With your Square Partner’s consent you can always visit the class again as a participant!*

#### 3. Information exchange

*How and when will you share your syllabus and Course Information Sheet? Some Squares prefer to exchange this information prior to the classroom visit. It works equally well to deliver this information to the visiting professor at the time of the classroom visit. Your Teaching Square packet provides a convenient place for organizing and storing this information regardless of when you exchange it.*

# Teaching Squares

## 4. Information to be shared with students

*Most students are very curious about the presence of a visitor in the classroom. We like to introduce the visiting professor and to explain the purpose for their visit and their role (observer or participant) in the class session. We have found that most students are very impressed to learn that their instructor is participating in a project to improve teaching.*

## 5. Classroom Visit Duration

*Class times can vary considerably. We think that observing an entire class session from start to finish offers the best (and least disruptive) experience for you, your Square Partner, and the students. If scheduling conflicts do not allow you to stay for an entire class, discuss with your Square Partner the least disruptive means of joining and leaving the class. We think that a visit of no less than 50 minutes is required in order to adequately sample the classroom experience.*

## 6. Square Share time and location

*Your Square Share should occur before the All Squares Celebration. We have found that setting the Square Share date at the organizational meeting greatly reduces both the time devoted to Square administration and the likelihood of a scheduling conflict. We strongly urge you to set your Square Share date as soon as possible.*

*We strongly encourage you to consider conducting your Square Share away from the campus in a relaxing location free from the possibility of interruption.*

# Teaching Squares

## Sharing Course Information

*In all likelihood, your Square Partner will have an imperfect notion of your course and its function in your students' academic lives.*

*You can help your Square Partners gain a greater appreciation of the work that you do by providing the following:*

- *A copy of the course syllabus*
- *A brief description of why these students are taking the course*
  - Transfer /or/ career /or/ personal interest
  - Required course for major /or/ general education course /or/ developmental course
- *Major teaching goal for the course -*
  - Higher-order thinking skills
  - Basic academic success skills
  - Discipline-specific knowledge and skills
  - Liberal arts and academic values
  - Work and career preparation
  - Personal development

*The Course Information form has been included for your convenience in conveying this information to your Square Partners.*

# Teaching Squares

## Arranging Classroom Visits

### Square Pairs

*The Teaching Square Project Timeline has been established to allow you to visit one class per week during the class visitation period. You will need to contact your Square Partners to arrange for these class visits. The actual visitation schedule will depend on your and your Partners' availability. When constructing the schedule you might want to consider a Square Pair.*

*A Square Pair is a mutual visit exchange. It is an easy way to organize your visits, and it provides concentrated contact with a Square Partner. A Square Pair-based visitation schedule might look something like this:*

<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>

<b>Week</b>	<b>Pair 1</b>	<b>Pair 2</b>
1	A B	C D
2	A C	B D
3	A D	B C

# Teaching Squares

## Classroom Visitation Checklist

*The class that your Partner visits should be as “normal” as possible. The visiting Partner should understand that he/she may have missed some background information critical to understanding that day’s material.*

*Your Square Partner will find it much easier to follow the flow of your class if you provide the following:*

- ✓ **Course Syllabus**
- ✓ **Course Information Sheet**
- ✓ **Textbook**
- ✓ **Daily Materials**

*Your Square may choose to share the syllabus and Course Information Sheet prior to the class visit.*

*Tip: Use your Teaching Squares folder to collect the materials you receive during your class visits. They will be a handy reference when preparing your reflections.*

# Teaching Squares

## Square Share

*After completing your classroom visits, you will need to organize your reflections to share with your colleagues.*

***Your Teaching Squares experience offers you the opportunity to improve your own teaching by observing your Square Partners in an actual classroom situation. It is NOT an invitation to offer feedback to improve your Partners' teaching.***

*Keep your reflections **positive** and **personal**. We have found that offering opinions (even positive ones) or direct observations on a Square Partner's teaching creates a judgmental climate and undermines the trust necessary to the success of the Teaching Squares experience.*

*We have found these questions to be helpful in shaping our feedback:*

- About Teaching Squares
  - What are some specific things you liked about the project?
  - What are some suggestions for improving the project?
  
- How did your participation in Teaching Squares give you a greater appreciation of:
  - Our students?
  - Our colleagues?
  - St. Louis Community College?
  - The teaching profession?
  
- What did you observe that you might use to make your own teaching more effective?



# Teaching Squares

## Course Information Sheet

**Course Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Major teaching goal for the course:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Higher-order thinking skills
- \_\_\_\_\_ Basic academic success skills
- \_\_\_\_\_ Discipline-specific knowledge and skills
- \_\_\_\_\_ Liberal arts and academic values
- \_\_\_\_\_ Work and career preparation
- \_\_\_\_\_ Personal development

**Student course goals:**

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