Collecting and Using Student Feedback

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Collecting and Using Mid-semester Feedback

Teaching Support Services by Jeanette McDonald Edited by Trevor Holmes © Teaching Support Services, University of Guelph Guelph, Ontario, Canada Revised October 2004
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INTRODUCTION

1. Collecting feedback from students can serve multiple purposes. Depending on your goals for feedback and the tools employed, you can:
   - Gain valuable insight as to what and how students are learning or not learning (e.g., what they know or don’t know about a particular lesson, unit of study, concept, etc.);
   - Receive feedback on your teaching (specific or general depending on the level of specificity you request); and
   - Provide students with a vehicle to communicate with you about the course (e.g., their experience with the course so far).
   - Provides an opportunity for formative assessment

2. Formative Feedback
   - Performed at various points throughout the semester
   - Allows the instructor to respond immediately to learning and teaching issues expressed by students
   - Data collected tends to be qualitative in nature – provides more descriptive information
   - Breadth of instruments and faculty choice allows the instructor to collect targeted feedback
   - Provides a mechanism for students to communicate with the instructor, which in turn helps build community

3. Collecting Feedback
   - Before requesting feedback, let students know why you are interested in their input and what you plan on doing with the information. Emphasize learning (e.g., Are there things I can do to better support your learning?) This helps promote buy-in on their part (how are they going to benefit?). Also consider asking what they themselves can change to support their own learning.
   - Reinforce to students that you are looking for constructive feedback that you can respond to during the course of the semester (e.g., need for more examples, pace of classes). This helps deter comments that you can’t respond to effectively or within the parameters of the course (e.g., “I hate the textbook!”).
   - Only collect data that you can (and will) actually use or respond to. It’s a waste of your time and the students’ to do otherwise.

4. Interpreting Feedback
   - If you teach a large class, select a random sample for review. This makes the process more manageable and less overwhelming. Don’t forget to tell
students ahead of time if this is your intended strategy.

- Focus on the positives! Don’t let two or three isolated negative comments change the quality of your teaching. At the same time, don’t negate what they say. Student comments must be put into context, measured against all other comments from this and other classes, and understood to be a reflection of a limited number of students (perhaps one or two) – not the majority. Keep in mind that some comments may not be fair/legitimate criticisms – see *Teaching Professor* 18:8 (Oct 2004) for a discussion of “deliberate negatives.”

- Review student comments with a trusted colleague or peer. A colleague can help put things into perspective and help identify where appropriate changes can be made.

5. **Sharing Feedback with Your Students**

- Share a summary of the students’ feedback at the next class meeting (or as soon as possible) and identify how you intend to respond. Even if you can’t address all their concerns during the course of the semester, let them know where you are coming from and what you CAN do. Students appreciate your openness and honesty.
GOOD TEACHERS & GOOD TEACHING: NINE KEY ELEMENTS FACULTY & STUDENTS AGREE ON

- Knowledge of the Subject/Discipline
- Course Preparation and Organization
- Clarity and Understandability
- Enthusiasm for the Subject and Teaching
- Sensitivity to and Concern for Students’ Level of Learning and Learning Progress
- Availability and Helpfulness
- Quality of Examinations
- Impartiality in Evaluating Students
- Overall Fairness to Students

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTOR BEHAVIOURS

(Source: The Teaching Professor, April 1993, p.1)

In the April 1993 issue of The Teaching Professor, Larry Ludewig of Kilgore College in Texas shared the results of a study he conducted on behaviors that destroy teacher/student cooperation. The purpose of the study was “to discover the teacher behaviors that students believe are most detrimental to the instruction and learning process.”

To create the survey, Ludewig asked his students to identify teacher behaviors that inhibit positive instructor/student relationships. He culled a list of 76 items. He, in turn, sent out a survey of those 76 behaviors to students from a variety of disciplines (primarily Liberal Arts), asking them to identify the 10 most offensive faculty behaviors. From the 225 surveys returned, he created a top-ten list. The behaviors are listed below with the number of times the item was selected in parentheses, followed by the percentage of students who chose that particular item.

**Top 10 Faculty Behaviors Students Dislike**

1. Assigning work as if their class is the only one or is the most important of the courses students take (101) 45%.

2. Lecturing too fast and then failing to slow down when requested (90) 40%.

3. Making students feel inferior when they ask a question (79) 35%.

4. Not being specific on what tests and examinations will cover (77) 34%.

5. Using trick questions on an exam (76) 34%.

6. Delivering lecture material with a monotone voice (71) 32%.

7. Giving tests that do not correspond with material covered during class meetings (64) 28%.

8. Getting behind in covering what needs to be addressed during lecture or the semester, then cramming in what’s left to be covered (63) 28%.

9. Assuming students already have a base knowledge for the course (59) 26%.

10. Requiring a textbook and then failing to use it (56) 25%
Ways to obtain Feedback on Instruction

1) **Solicit background information about your students regarding aspects you think will influence the instructional process.** At the beginning of the course, for example, you might ask students to complete a learning styles inventory or respond to a set of questions about their knowledge of a topic or their experiences coming into the course. Use the data collected to enhance the design of your course, the selection of examples chosen to illustrate concepts/key points, the delivery of learning materials, the level to which you pitch your course (e.g., basic or advanced), the incorporation of individual or group assignments, and so on.

2) **Ask students for feedback periodically throughout the semester.** Invite students to reflect upon and comment about various aspects of the course, your teaching or their learning. Limit what you ask for to elements that you have the ability to change during the semester. You might ask if more or less time should be set aside for questions or discussion, if the pace of lecture is too fast, or if more examples are needed to explain concepts. With respect to student learning, you might ask students to identify questions they are left with about a particular unit of study OR topics they would like addressed at an upcoming review session. To save time in large classes, assign students to teams and have them designate a “recorder” to capture everyone’s comments for submission (hardcopy or electronic form) or a review a random sample of student submissions only.

3) **Periodically, ask to borrow several students’ lecture notes.** Compare student notes with your own lecture outline. There are often differences between what a teacher says and what a student hears. Student notes may give you clues as to what they interpret as important and what needs to be reviewed.

4) **Organize a Student Liaison Committee** or “Ombudspeople” of three to five students to meet with you regularly to discuss your course (e.g., strengths and weaknesses). Let other students know who the committee members are so they can connect with them outside of class and encourage committee members to speak with other students individually or in groups to elicit constructive feedback.

5) **Ask a colleague, friend, or campus resource person to attend your class.** Develop a set of questions or aspects about your teaching/course that you would like him/her to observe closely. Meet with them after class to discuss their observations and recommendations.

6) **At the end of each academic semester, fill out a copy of the teaching evaluation form given to students by your department or school.** After final grades are submitted, compare your own self-ratings and comments with those of your students. If discrepancies exist, explore the implications of them with an understanding colleague, or consultant from CETL.

7) **Visit the classes of colleagues whom you consider to be excellent teachers (with permission of course).** Note strategies or practices they implement when delivering lectures, leading student discussions, conducting laboratory or studio sessions, incorporating active learning elements,
managing a large class, etc. Talk to them afterwards about their rationale for use, out-of-class preparations, and so on. See if you can adapt some of their teaching methods and strategies in your own teaching.

8) **Develop an online survey form using Blackboard or a free survey tool.** Use the “survey” function under in Blackboard to develop a series of qualitative (e.g., open-ended questions) and/or quantitative (e.g., Likert scales) questions that students can respond to anonymously. OR - incorporate one of the evaluation tools outlined in the appendix. The “START-STOP-CONTINUE” method works particularly well.

Appendix
START, STOP, CONTINUE (SSC)

(Source: Strobino, J., “Building a Better Mousetrap.” The Teaching Professor, January, 1997, p.6)

This evaluation tool provides feedback on students’ classroom experiences, and is both simple and straightforward to implement.

Directions:
- Direct students to draw three columns on a sheet of paper, one of each labeled – START, STOP, and CONTINUE.
- Under the START column, ask students to record any instructional practices, policies, or behaviors they would like the teacher (YOU) to start using.
- Under the STOP column, direct students to list any teaching practices, policies, or behaviors they would like to see ended in the classroom.
- Under the CONTINUE column, ask students to list those elements which they would like to see continued.
- Collect feedback, summarize results, and share feedback with students the following class.
- Use this tool periodically throughout the semester – used too often, the newness of the tool may diminish and student enthusiasm lessen (suggestions and ratings tend also to stabilize over time).

Notes:
- Use this technique to collect feedback on a variety of areas such as reading materials, learning activities, procedural practices, teaching methods, use of technology, etc.
- The Author also suggests adding a five point (Likert) scale to the SSC Model to refine the level of feedback she collects. She asks about things such as:
  - “the extent to which student learning needs are met,”
  - “the clarity of the presentations,” and
  - “their assessment of the correlation between classroom activities and course objectives.” (provides a preview of what to expect for end-of-course evaluations)
- From personal experience, the author notes that the more she implements the SSC Model and actually implements student suggestions, the less responses she receives for STOP and START, and the more she receives for CONTINUE.
- This evaluation tool does take some class time, but the opportunity for the instructor to explain why things are done in a certain way (in response to feedback) and the chance for students to see their personal suggestions put into practice – helps create a positive learning environment.
Teaching Journals: A Self-Assessment Strategy

(Source: The Teaching Professor, June 1988, p. 2)

Whether you are new to teaching or a seasoned instructor, a teaching journal can be a valuable aid for collecting feedback and improving instructional planning.

Guidelines for Use:
After each class meeting, take 10 or 15 minutes to record your observations about the class. Use a journal or write in the margin of your lecture notes or lesson plan. Note things such as: the types of questions asked by students, where examples or illustrations could have been added, how a learning activity was received, where an explanation could be improved - whatever comes to mind. You might choose to start out by identifying three things you did well in class and three things most in need of improvement.

The following exert illustrates one professor’s experience with the technique.
A faculty member we know admits she stumbled upon it once when teaching a class for the first time. She was in the middle of a lecture when a student asked for an example to illustrate the point she was trying to make. She came up cold. She turned to the class for help and got three good examples. She wrote them in her notes so she would have them for the next time. The next day she botched an explanation, and found herself circling it in her notes with large letters saying, “FIX THIS!” Intermittently throughout that semester she wrote notes to herself, identifying what worked and didn’t work. She did not realize the value of it until she taught the course the following year. “I had all these suggestions and ideas. Even the short notes brought back all sorts of other memories of the class – things I know I would never have remembered otherwise.”
The “Dear Professor” Letter

(Source: The Teaching Professor, May 1998, p.6)

This assessment and feedback tool was developed by Debra Pallatto-Fontaine of Assumption College, MA. She uses it as a mechanism to “get to know [her] students on a personal level; to have an ongoing, individual conversation with them throughout the semester; and to monitor their progress in learning course content.” Pallatto-Fontaine has found this tool to be successful and maintains it’s worth the effort. As research on student learning suggests, opportunity to connect and interact with teachers helps promote student motivation and involvement, and commitment to learning.

Pallatto-Fontaine assigns the “Dear Professor” letter every two weeks. In it, she asks students to write about their cognitive and affective experiences in the class. She is interested in “how they have internalized what they have read, how they relate that information to life experiences, and how they feel about the material and [her] presentation of it.” The following are two student quotes, taken from their letters:

**Cognitive:** “I was able to apply some of the concepts we’ve learned in class to my volunteer experience this semester. I have kept a mental note of Erikson’s stages of development and I have compared various behavioral theories.”

**Affective:** “It has come to the final ‘Dear Professor’ letter. I have to be honest with you. In the beginning I did not like to write these letters, but as time went on I realized the importance of [them]... After the second one, I began to enjoy them! This was the most communication that I had with a teacher on a regular basis throughout a semester.”

In terms of process, Pallatto-Fontaine responds to the letters with written comments. The time involved in reading and responding to each letter varies according to whether students respond to both domains (cognitive and affective) or only one – 1 to 3 pages seems to be the average. She uses a check, check plus, or check minus grading scheme, accounting for 15% of the final course grade.

Overall, she says it’s worth the effort and offers her valuable insight to student thinking, while at the same time receiving feedback on what works and doesn’t work in the classroom.

She ends her article with the following statement: “by keeping the lines of communication open throughout the semester, I can improve my teaching techniques and observe how the content is impacting the growth of my students. What more could I ask for in an assignment?”
The One Minute Paper


Instructions: Respond to the following questions as concisely as possible.

What are the two (three or four) significant (central or useful) things (concepts, topics) you have learned during this class?

What questions remain uppermost in your mind?

What could I have done differently to help you understand (learn) today’s lecture material (optional question)?

1. Which of the following experiences related to this course has most helped you learn? NOTE: I am not asking which you most enjoyed, but which contributed most to your skill development.
   Please rate the following: 1 (least helpful) - 8 (most helpful), use each number only once.
   __ Readings/textbook  __ Lecture/power points
   __ Full class discussion  __ Small group activities/discussion
   __ Completing assign/activities  __ Talking with students outside class
   __ Using Madison College planner  __ Talking with instructor outside class
   (This list should be adjusted based on the course and activities)

2. Are you still confused about a topic covered in class? If yes, list topic.

3. What suggestions do you have for how I can improve the class?

4. Is there a topic you would like included in this course that is currently not on the syllabus? Please list: (This question may not be appropriate for all courses)
On-line Resources

Fox Valley Assessment Tools and Strategies
http://www.fvtc.edu/public/content.aspx?ID=1668&PID=16

Authentic Assessment Toolbox
http://jonathan.mueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/toolbox/index.htm

Online Teaching Goals Inventory:
http://fm.iowa.uiowa.edu/fmi/xsl/tgi/data_entry.xsl?-db=tgi_data-&-lay=Layout01-&-view

Quick and Easy Feedback Strategies
http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/feedback/gatherstufeed.htm

College of Dupage – Classroom Assessment
http://www.cod.edu/Dept/Outcomes/cats.htm

Madison College Assessment & Curriculum Blackboard Site- all employees automatically enrolled.
https://blackboard.matcmadison.edu/

University of Honolulu Faculty Teaching Guide Book
http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/teachtip.htm

Text Resources
