Securing Student Feedback

The feedback students can provide on your instruction and the usefulness of class activities can be valuable in helping you improve and refine your teaching. By soliciting midsemester feedback, you can also make adjustments to your instruction and course activities while there is still time to meet student needs.

Before asking students for feedback on your teaching by using any of the following techniques, take the time to teach students about the importance of an honest critique as opposed to criticism. Modeling constructive feedback throughout the course when evaluating students' work will help them in providing beneficial critiques.

Suggestions for Designing Feedback Forms

1. Limit the number of questions.
2. Ask for feedback multiple times but not all the time.
3. Assess learner reactions to class activities and assignments.
4. Include both multiple-choice and open-ended questions.
5. Ask questions that assess teaching performance.
   - Example: What would you like the teacher to do that would facilitate your learning?
6. Provide these directions to students:
   - Give specific examples.
   - Focus on observable behaviors.
   - State alternatives and preferences.

The following techniques have been found to be helpful in gathering student feedback.

Stop-Start-Continue: Invite students to respond to questions in the Stop-Start-Continue format. By midway through the term, students are able to provide feedback about their learning experiences. Ask them to list anything they wish would be stopped in class. Examples can include the use of certain materials, activities, instructor behaviors, etc. Then have them post anything they think should start—for example, more time for discussion, papers being returned more quickly, or opportunities to earn bonus points. Finally, ask them to describe what is working well and should be continued. Collect students' responses and follow up with students as soon as possible to let them know what you learned from the feedback and what you intend to do with the feedback. (See the Instructor Resources in this module for a Stop-Start-Continue handout you can distribute to students.)

Point-of-View (POV) Postcard: Ask students to send an email at any time during the first half of the term with their point of view about the class. Assign a grade to make it clear this is an assignment. Suggest a prompt such as "I have learned the most in class when we…" or "My learning in this class could be improved by…"

Assignment Analysis: Ask students to provide feedback on individual assignments using an assignment analysis chart. (See the Instructor Resources in this module to download this chart.)

Small-Group Instructional Diagnosis (SGID) Sessions: SGID is a structured process for conducting a midterm evaluation. Joseph Clark and Mark Redmond designed the method in which an outside facilitator "takes student through a series of questions about the course, individually and in small groups" (University of Northern Iowa, n.d.). Four questions are suggested:

- What do you like most about this course so far?
- What do you like least about the course so far?
- What suggestions do you have for your instructor to improve your learning experience in this course?
- What might you do to improve your own learning experiences and those of other students in this course?

Read more about SGID on the University of Northern Iowa's website at
http://www.uni.edu/provost/cetl/small-group-instructional-diagnosis.

Use Student Feedback to Inform Instructional and Course Adjustments

The feedback students provide on instructional approaches and course activities can be valuable in helping you refine your teaching and course activities, assignments, and assessments in an effort to improve student engagement and learning. By soliciting feedback throughout the course, you can also make "just-in-time" adjustments.

Prior to obtaining student feedback, take time to teach students about the importance of an honest critique as opposed to criticism. Modeling constructive feedback throughout the course when evaluating students' work will help them provide more beneficial critique to you and to their peers should you include peer review, and will help them learn an important life skill.

This planning guide offers: (a) timing for obtaining feedback, (b) feedback guidelines and practices, and (c) effectively responding to feedback.

Timing for Obtaining Feedback

First-Impression Feedback: Securing student feedback after the first or second week of an online course helps you to identify and quickly address any major concerns students have with the course. The goal at this point is to check on your students' perceptions of their course experience and quickly identify barriers to learning.

Early-in-the-Course Feedback: After three to four weeks, it is a good idea to collect feedback on particular course elements such as the quiz tool and discussion forums. The goal of this feedback is to encourage students to reflect on how these key learning opportunities are helping them to learn and what might be adjusted or improved.

Middle-of-the-Course Feedback: In the middle of the course, you may want to gather feedback about the overall course experience. The goal of this feedback is to bring to light any suggested changes to improve students' learning experiences during the remainder of the course.

End-of-the-Course Feedback: Your institution may have a standard evaluation form that students are required to complete at the end of your course, but it is also helpful to use a closing feedback forum to obtain feedback that can improve the course experience for future students. The goal of this feedback is for students to reflect on their overall learning experience and share ways that it could be improved.

Feedback Guidelines and Practices

General Design Suggestions

- Limit the number of questions.
- Ask for feedback multiple times but not all the time.
- Include both multiple-choice and open-ended questions.
- Ask questions that focus on teaching impact.
    - Example: What additional steps can I take to help facilitate your learning?
- Include these phrases to obtain the type of feedback that is most helpful:
    - It is helpful if you provide specific examples when referencing something that worked or did not work for you as a learner.
    - When suggesting that something be changed, provide an alternative, perhaps a resource or approach another professor has used that you found helpful.

Online Survey Suggestions

Solicit feedback via an anonymous online poll with SurveyMonkey or Qualtrics, asking quick and easy-to-answer questions (i.e., yes/no, rating, or multiple choice), with the option to add more information via open-text responses. Below are some questions you might ask early in the course:

1. Are you having any difficulties accessing the site or course materials? Yes or No
2. If yes, what challenges are you experiencing?
3. How would you rate the content thus far? (Check all that apply)
   a. Too easy
   b. Too difficult
   c. Interesting
   d. Stimulating
   e. Informative
   f. Confusing
4. Are the following course expectations clear and realistic? Yes or No
   a. Posting to discussion forums
   b. Assignment submissions and due dates
   c. Communicating with the instructor
   d. Attending synchronous meetings
5. How nervous are you about the course?
   a. Not at all nervous
   b. A little nervous
   c. Somewhat nervous
   d. Nervous
   e. Very nervous
6. How often would you like to hear from the instructor? (Check one)
   a. More
   b. Less
   c. About the same

Feedback Practices

Practice #1: Start-Stop-Continue Feedback

By midway through the term, students are able to provide feedback about their learning experiences. Invite students to respond to questions in the Start-Stop-Continue format through an anonymous discussion forum, an open-response survey, or a Google document. First, ask students to post anything they think should start—for example, more time for discussion, papers being returned more quickly, or opportunities to earn bonus points. Next, ask them to share suggestions for things that might be stopped because they are not helpful to their learning—for example, the requirement to respond to at least two peers in a discussion forum. Finally, ask students to share any instructional approaches, assignment types, or activities they want to be sure are continued. This list would include items they find particularly helpful. Examples can include the use of certain materials, activities, instructor behaviors, etc.

> **Instructions to Students:** Your feedback about what is working and not working for your learning in the class is important to me because I want to ensure that our course is as effective for you as it can be. Please response to the following prompts. Your responses are anonymous, and your honest feedback is fully appreciated.

1. **Start:** What practices should we start doing that would enhance your learning? If you can, please describe the practices you are recommending, and explain how they have helped you learn in the past.
2. **Stop:** Which aspects of the course should be stopped because they have *not* been effective for your learning, and why?

3. **Continue:** Which aspects of the course should be continued because they have been effective for your learning, and why?

Practice #2: Plus/Delta Feedback

Create a content page or group wiki in your learning management system (LMS) or use Google Docs to create a Plus/Delta form consisting of two columns: Plus (aspects of the course that are working well) and Delta (aspects of the course that should be changed or improved).

Instructions to Students: In order to determine what is working well (Plus) and what might be changed (Delta) moving forward, please share your suggestions on the appropriate side of the online document. Consider all aspects of the course that you have encountered so far, including course content, activities, our course site, instructor feedback, small-group work, etc.

- In order to avoid repeats, read through what has already been written on each side of the wiki before you post.
- If you would have listed the same item that someone else has already posted, mark the item with a plus sign.
- If you would like to make an adjustment, do not erase or change what others have written, but go ahead and write an adjusted version below.

Plus *List any aspects of the course experience that are creating an effective learning environment*	Delta *List any aspects of the course that you think may need to be changed or improved*

Practice #3: Point-of-View (POV) Email

Ask students to send an email at any time during the first half of the term with their point of view about the class. Assign a grade to make it clear that this is an assignment. Suggest a prompt such as "I have learned the most in class when we . . ." or "My learning in this class could be improved by . . ."

Practice #4: Assignment Analysis

Ask students to provide feedback on individual assignments using an assignment analysis chart or as an addition to each assignment. Some faculty have found it useful to include this feedback on every assignment and to offer a few points for completing it added to their overall assignment grade.

Please provide feedback on the following assignments.

Assignment	Time spent on the assignment	Were the directions clear?	Were the evaluation criteria clear?	How much did you learn?	Suggestions for refinement
		o Yes o No o Suggestions	o Yes o No o Suggestions	o I learned a lot. o I learned quite a bit. o I learned a little bit. o I am not sure of the purpose of this assignment.	
		o Yes o No o Suggestions	o Yes o No o Suggestions	o I learned a lot. o I learned quite a bit. o I learned a little bit. o I am not sure of the purpose of this assignment.	

Effectively Responding to Feedback

After receiving student feedback, it is very important to explicitly let students know how you will utilize their feedback. Summarizing the feedback and explaining the changes you will or will not be making sends a signal that you are listening, you care, and you take their feedback seriously. This is also an excellent opportunity to point out resources that students may not be aware are available. For example, a student may have mentioned that they wish you would provide a study guide. You may then share with them that your expectation is that the skeletal outline, once completed, should serve as their study guide. In addition, you may share the research behind the benefits of creating their own notes and explain how they can use the skeletal outline as their own personalized study guide.

Even small changes in course activities, such as a different due date or process, can make a difference in student learning and overall satisfaction (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016). After reviewing the feedback, send an email or video that:

o   thanks students for their feedback and explains why the feedback is important,
o   summarizes their responses,
o   explains the changes you will or will not be able to make in response to the feedback, and
o   invites further feedback.

Responding to Challenging Feedback

One challenge instructors face when responding to feedback is that students may give conflicting feedback. Some students will say that they really like a particular aspect of the course, while others will not like the same aspect. Another challenge occurs when students have concerns about aspects of the course that you are not willing or able to change. When responding to challenging student feedback:

o   **Acknowledge Conflicting Feedback**. When students have mixed opinions about assignments, activities, presentation materials, or the way course content is presented, let them know that certain things are working well for some and not for others. To adjust for this, you can consider occasionally giving options or varying the usage of the materials or activities that get mixed reviews.

o   **Acknowledge Negative Feedback and Explain Rationale**. If students provide negative feedback about aspects of the course you may not be willing to change, such as the amount of reading or the fact that

there is group work, you should acknowledge their feelings so that they feel heard. Then it may be helpful to explain the rationale behind the assignment or coursework in order to help them understand how these types of assignments can help them.

o **Offer Additional Support**. Although you may not be willing to change some aspects of the course, you can respond to negative feedback by offering extra office hours, supplemental videos to help struggling students, or examples of successful student work.

Example email to students following Start-Stop-Continue Feedback Survey	
Thank you for filling out the Start-Stop-Continue feedback forms! It truly helps to hear how the course is going for you, so I can make adjustments to improve your learning experience.	*The instructor thanks the students and explains the importance of the feedback.*
Some of you noted that you appreciate the required chapter outlines, and some really don't view these as helpful. I do think the outlines will be helpful to you when it comes time for the final exam, but I also understand that the extra work feels like a burden. To help cut down on the extra work, I'm going to assign each of you to do one of the remaining chapter outlines, and I will share it with the rest of the class. This way, you all get a complete set of outlines but only have to do one yourself.	*The instructor acknowledges conflicting feedback and makes a small adjustment to accommodate as many students as possible.*
Many people commented that they do not like the group assignments. I know that group work can be frustrating and challenging, but engineering is a field that requires a lot of collaboration and teamwork, so it is important for you to gain this experience.	*The instructor acknowledges negative feedback and explains the rationale for this type of assignment.*
Group work functions best when the roles are clear and you know how to communicate with one another and work through conflicts. To help you with this, I will be holding extra virtual office hours on Thursday from 2–3 p.m. I'll provide some ideas for managing classic group work issues, and I will be available to answer your specific questions. I'll record the session for anyone who can't attend office hours.	*The instructor offers additional support for students who are struggling with the assignment.*
I learned from your feedback that our midterm falls on the same day as a big chemistry exam that many of you are taking. In response, I will hold the midterm one week later—on March 14 instead of March 7. However, please note that I cannot change the final exam date because of the due date for grades. So, please plan accordingly.	*The instructor makes a small change to accommodate students' challenges and explains why other changes cannot be made.*

Source

Boettcher, J. V., & Conrad, R.-M. (2016). *The online teaching survival guide: Simple and practical pedagogical tips* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.