

Teaching Support Services

Collecting and Using Mid-semester Feedback

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Revised October 2004

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
How Faculty Can Gain Assistance as Teachers – Model	4
Good Teachers & Good Teaching: Nine Key Elements Faculty & Students Agree On	5
Student Perceptions of Instructor Behaviours.	6
10 Ways to Obtain Feedback on Instruction	7
Appendix: Instruments and Ideas for Collecting Feedback	9
START, STOP, CONTINUE..	10
Teaching Journals: A Self-Evaluation Strategy	11
The Dear Professor Letter	12
The Minute Paper	13
Online and Text Resources	14

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).
2. **Collecting feedback from students is both a summative and formative exercise.**

Formative Feedback
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 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▪ optional whether student feedback is included in your teaching dossier or the Tenure and Promotion process
Summative Feedback
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ performed at the end of the semester upon completion of the course (or unit of study)▪ feedback collected can have a formative purpose, but with a future rather than immediate impact (e.g., on the course, student learning, your teaching)▪ students who provide the feedback don't benefit from changes implemented▪ within the Guelph context: (1) all UG courses are evaluated at the end of the semester using a standardized form by dept/college, (2) quantitative emphasis, (3) often takes place within a normative framework – for comparison of instructors, (4) quantitative results and signed comments included in the Tenure and Promotion process▪ TSS can help to interpret and respond to the results

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.
- Third and fourth year students tend to be more skilled at providing constructive feedback. First and second year students may need more precise instructions and examples to offer useful feedback. Entering students in particular are not used to being asked for their opinion on teaching and learning matters. They view you as the expert.
- 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.

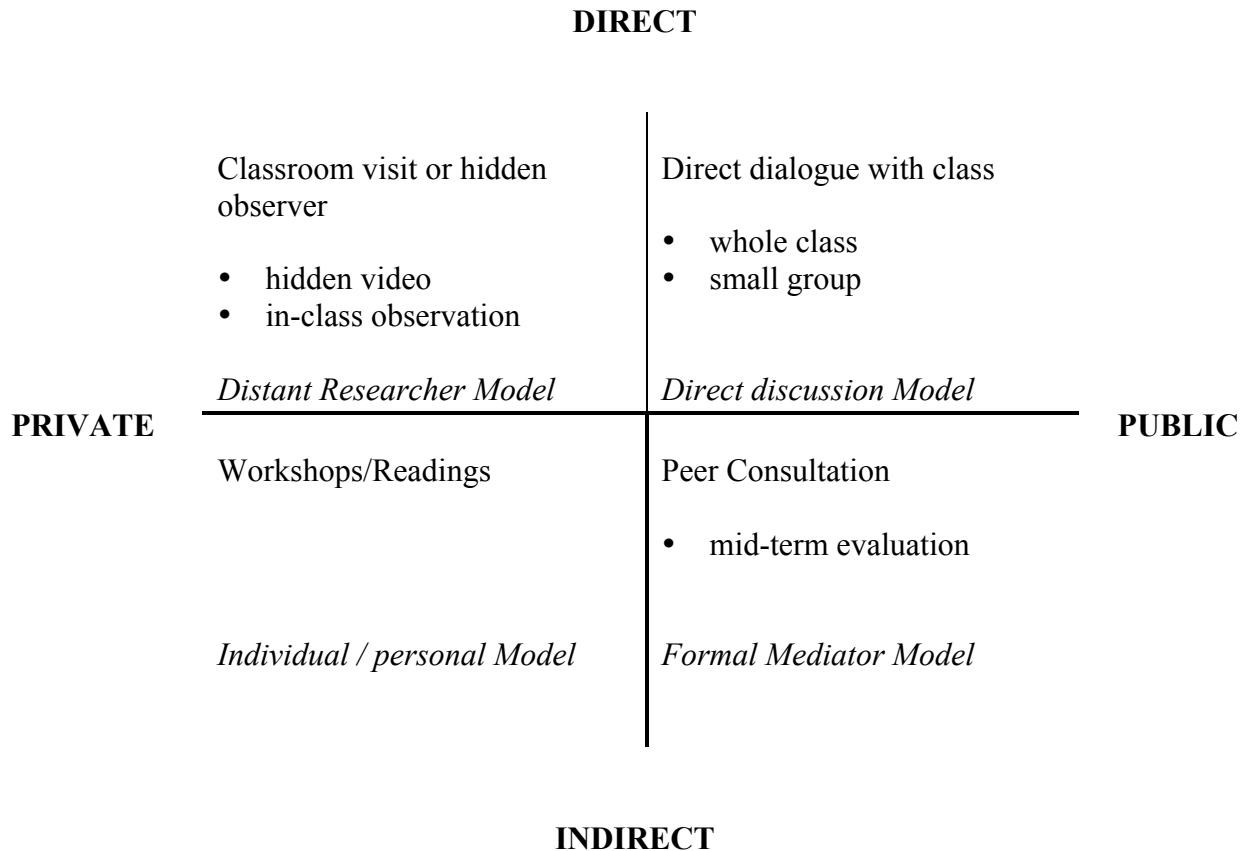
5. Sharing Feedback with Your Students

- 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.

HOW FACULTY CAN GAIN ASSISTANCE AS TEACHERS

(Adapted from: William Rando, Northwestern University in Chicago)

There are many approaches to collecting feedback on teaching and learning. Not all are appropriate for every situation. The mechanism you choose to gather data will depend on your intended goal and your level of comfort using that particular method. The following model outlines the “types” of approaches you may chose to implement for purposes of collecting feedback and reflecting on your teaching.



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

Source: Feldman, K. (1988). *Effective college teaching from the students' and faculty's view: Matched or mis-matched priorities?* Research in Higher Education, 28 (4), 291-344.

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 behaviours that destroy teacher/student cooperation. The *purpose* of the study was “to discover the teacher behaviours that students believe are most detrimental to the instruction and learning process.”

To create the survey, Ludewig asked his students to identify teacher behaviours that inhibit positive instructor/student relationships. He culled a list of 76 items. He, in turn, sent out a survey of those 76 behaviours to students from a variety of disciplines (primarily Liberal Arts), asking them to identify the 10 most offensive faculty behaviours. From the 225 surveys returned, he created a top-ten list. The behaviours 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 Behaviours 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%

10 WAYS TO OBTAIN FEEDBACK ON INSTRUCTION*

There are many simple, but useful teaching improvement activities that can be easily and inexpensively implemented by instructors throughout the semester. Fourteen examples are presented in this section. Not every method is suitable for all courses and teaching styles, but many have broad application.

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. **Videotape your lectures from time to time to improve organization, clarity, and overall presentation.** Contact the Peer Consultation Program - a confidential service coordinated through Teaching Support Services – to explore this option. Trained peer consultants (faculty like you) are available to help you interpret student feedback, act as a sounding board for your concerns and ideas about aspects of your teaching, provide suggestions or strategies to enhance teaching, and much more. Tailor a plan with a consultant to suit your specific interests and needs. Visit <http://www.tss.uoguelph.ca/id/peer.html> for more details.
4. **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.
5. **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.

6. **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.. Resources on working with a colleague for feedback purposes are available from the Teaching Resource Centre (Day Hall, Rm. 125). Contact: Trevor Holmes at 52963.
7. **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, TA, or consultant from Teaching Support Services.
8. **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. Contact Teaching Support Services or the chair of your department for names of instructors to connect with.
9. **Develop an online (anonymous) evaluation form using WebCT.** Use the “survey” function under the “quiz” feature of WebCT 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.
10. **Take advantage of the services and resources of national or discipline-based associations and organizations that support teaching and learning.** Many associations (and publishers for that matter) publish newsletters or journals devoted to instruction and hold annual meetings or conferences on teaching and learning. The Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE), for example, serves the Canadian academic community. Each year they host an annual conference, publish a bi-annual newsletter, and moderate an active listserv on teaching and learning. Visit their website at <http://www.stlhe.ca> for more information. For a listing of higher education associations, organizations and centres or “Periodicals Related to University Teaching” visit the TSS website <http://www.tss.uoguelph.ca> Other publications to consider, include: *The Teaching Professor* newsletter, *Teaching Tips*, and *Tools for Teaching*. Search the Teaching Resource Centre (TRC) resources online using Trellis or call x52963.

**Modified from Outcalt, D.L. (ed). "Twelve Faculty-Initiated Evaluation and Improvement Activities." Report of the Task Force on Teaching Evaluation. University of California, 1980.*

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 behaviours they would like the teacher (YOU) to start using.
- Under the STOP column, direct students to list any teaching practices, policies, or behaviours 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-EVALUATION 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 excerpt 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 behavioural 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

(Source: Thomas & Angelo (1993). Classroom Assessment Techniques. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass).

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)?

Refer to <http://www.siue.edu/~deder/assess/cats/minpap4.html> for guidelines in administering and using feedback.

COLLECTING AND USING MID-SEMESTER FEEDBACK

On-line Resources

STLHE List Archives (Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher education)
(many postings available under course evaluation and instructor evaluation)

<http://listserv.unb.ca/archives/stlhe-l.html>

Quick and Easy Feedback Strategies

<http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/feedback/gatherstufeed.htm>

Classroom Assessment Techniques (instructions and examples)

<http://www.siue.edu/~deder/assess/catmain.html>

What do they know anyway? (myths and facts about instructor evaluation)

<http://www2.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/users/f/felder/public/Columns/Eval.html>

Cornell University Teaching Evaluation Handbook

<http://www.clt.cornell.edu/resources/teh/teh.html>

Text Resources

Angelo, T. and Cross, K.P. (1993). Classroom Assessment Techniques. (wnd edition). San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Davis, B. G. (1993). Tools for Teaching. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass. (chapter 48 - Student Rating Forms)

Weimer, M.; Parrett, J.; Kerns, M. (1988). How Am I Teaching? Forms and Activities for Acquiring Instructional Input. Madison, WI: Magna Publications, Inc.

Teaching Goals Inventory, Self-Scorable Version (available from the TRC)