

1 Informal Feedback at Mid-Semester	2 Preparing a Personnel Portfolio
3 Conducting Productive Meetings	4 Teaching to Develop Critical Thinking

# 1 Informal Feedback at Mid-Semester (Including New MIT Program)

Four considerations for gathering student feedback during a course in progress are described below. This document also introduces a new FTLC service: Mid-Semester Interviews about Teaching (MIT), wherein an FTLC staff member visits your classroom, interviews your students about what is working well in the course and what could be improved, and then provides you with a summary report.

## SETUP

Course evaluations given at the end of the semester, while useful in their own right, don't help faculty members while the course is still in progress. The purposes of gathering informal feedback from your students at mid-semester are:

1. to allow you to correct student misconceptions or to make changes to the course schedule, activities, etc. if necessary,
2. to communicate to students that you care about their input, and
3. to provide an opportunity for students to reflect on their own expectations, efforts, and learning.

The suggestions provided here are not limited to use only at mid-semester; in fact, you are encouraged to gather feedback from your students as often as is appropriate for your course. Whether the students provide written feedback during class or through an online survey, setting the stage is helpful, as in shown in this example:

"Today I would like you to fill out a short mid-semester evaluation. The information you provide is just for me and your input is extremely valuable. It helps me gauge how the course is progressing at the moment, what is going well from your standpoint and whether you have any suggestions for how we might proceed for the rest of the semester. I will report back to you about the results."<sup>1</sup>

## TYPES OF QUESTIONS

The types of questions you ask depend on the level of the student and the type of course. As with any type of survey, quiz, or test, the questions must be carefully worded in order to get the kind of feedback you desire.

One approach to gathering feedback is to distribute 3x5 notecards or scraps of recycled paper and allow students to anonymously respond to one or more questions.

Examples of paired, open-ended questions:

- How is the class going for you?
- Give one concrete suggestion for improving this course.

or

- What is helping you learn in this course?
- What is making learning difficult?

Depending on the course, more directed questions may be appropriate:

- What are the two most important things you have learned so far?
- What don't you think you understand well enough yet?
- What would you like to see more of between now and the end of the semester?
- How much of the reading that has been assigned so far have you completed?

100% 90% 75% 50% less than 50%

- Outside of class, how many hours per week do you spend on this class?  
1-2   2-4   4-6   6-8   more than 8
- Are you having any technical difficulties? If so, please describe.
- Are you getting the “right” amount of feedback from your instructor?

In the Additional Resources section below, links are provided to several websites with a wealth of additional examples. Using class time to gather feedback can be useful in that response rates will be high and it signals to students that you value their feedback enough to devote class time to the process. Online surveys can also be administered through Blackboard. Visit the IT website and review the “Tests and Surveys” handouts - these documents guide you through setting up a survey and viewing the results (<http://www.gvsu.edu/it/>).

### RESPONDING TO THE FEEDBACK

Promptly responding to the feedback is a critical step in the process. Let the students know that you heard their suggestions and discuss how you intend to respond. Keep in mind that it isn't always easy to receive feedback.

After an initial read-through of the student comments, make a list of the positive things that students said. Then, identify the suggestions for improvement that can be implemented, those that will have to wait until the next time the course is offered, and those that are simply unrealistic. Acknowledging the latter comments in class gives you a chance to remind students of the pedagogical value of certain course elements that they might wish would go away (exams, finals, projects, etc.).

If you aren't sure how to respond or would simply like another pair of eyes, ask a colleague or the FTLC to review the feedback with you. Again, this suggestion may be an uncomfortable one, but much can be gained from talking about teaching. Conversations about your course can be richer if you have student feedback to supplement your own perceptions of how the class is progressing.

Reporting back to the students can take the form of a discussion, handout, PowerPoint presentation, or summary document posted on Blackboard. The most important thing is to let students know that they have been heard and that you take their feedback seriously. If you decide to change something about the course as a result of their feedback, let students know. If there are suggestions that have to wait until the next course offering, let

the students know why. As the semester progresses, remind students of any changes that you have made. Consider gathering additional feedback, if appropriate.

### MID-SEMESTER INTERVIEW ABOUT TEACHING (MIT)

This new FTLC service involves a member of our staff visiting a class, interviewing students in the instructor's absence, and reporting back to the instructor. Conducted during the 4th to 9th week of the semester, the MIT takes 30 minutes of class time wherein a consultant guides a three-step feedback process. First, students are asked to respond individually to two questions:

- What are the major strengths of this course? What is helping you learn?
- What changes would you make in this course to assist you in learning?

Small groups of students share their answers and responses are written on the board. The consultant then facilitates a discussion with the entire class, seeking clarification and consensus on the recommendations. After the MIT, the consultant meets with the instructor to discuss the feedback. Sometimes referred to as a Small Group Instructional Diagnosis, or SGID, this process provides useful formative feedback to the instructor and involves students in reflecting on their own learning. Visit the FTLC website for additional information, including research articles about this technique and sign-up instructions.

### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Collecting informal feedback from students during the semester does take time. It can be intimidating to hear what students think and to be held accountable to respond in some manner to the feedback. On the upside, it allows you to gather valuable information about how your students are learning and what they might need to improve their learning. The students receive the message that you care about them and value their input. The method of obtaining feedback can be as simple or as elaborate as you choose and even involve an outside facilitator. However you choose to collect feedback, understanding the experience of the class from the student perspective can help you identify concerns or misunderstanding that are hindering student learning. Feedback obtained during the semester allows the instructor to respond immediately to correct misunderstandings, alleviate concerns, and potentially change teaching strategies in order to improve student learning.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. Office of Educational Development, Division of Undergraduate Education, University of California,

**Berkeley, “Mid-semester Evaluations”**

<<http://teaching.berkeley.edu/semestereval.html>>

More sample questions and suggestions for responding to the feedback.

2. Angelo, T. A. And Cross, K. P. 1993. *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers*, 2nd Ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

This volume is a practical how-to guide that you can use to assess the quality of teaching and learning in their classroom. Fifty different Classroom Assessment Techniques are presented with suggestions for use, pros, cons, and caveats. These CATs engage student in creative and fun ways at the same time that they provide you will timely feedback.

3. The McGraw Center, Princeton University, “Mid-Semester Evaluation Instructions,”

<<http://www.princeton.edu/mcgraw/library/for-faculty/midcourseevals/index.xml>>

The three documents in the right-hand menu provide a template and sample questions for paper or online mid-semester feedback.

4. Mid-Semester Interview about Teaching. Visit our website for more information about the program or to schedule an interview for one of your classes.

**We welcome your questions, comments, suggestions.**

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**THE ROBERT AND MARY**  
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