

Improving Your Teaching: Obtaining Feedback

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Center for Research on Learning and Teaching

Just as students benefit in their learning from receiving your comments on their papers and assignments, you may find it beneficial in improving your teaching to receive feedback from your students. The more information that you gather about your teaching the more you can make informed changes that will be beneficial both to your students and to you as you develop as a teacher. There are several sources of information that you can use: student feedback, self evaluation, peer observation, viewing a videotape of your teaching, and consultation with a staff member at CRLT or with someone from your department.

Student Feedback

Receiving student feedback in the middle of the semester can help you know what you are doing that facilitates the learning of the students and it will help make you aware of any difficulties they may be having with your instruction. It allows you to make adjustments needed by students in your class before the end of the semester and will foster a feeling among your students that you care about your teaching. Often minor adjustments on your part can make a tremendous difference in the classroom.

Two useful methods of getting information from students on how they perceive your teaching are outlined below.

- (1) *Get written feedback.* Have your students fill out a questionnaire about six weeks into the semester. By this time students have a general sense of the class and your teaching. The anonymity of the questionnaire will allow students to be honest about how they feel about the course and about you as their teacher. In this Guidebook, there is an example of a mid-course questionnaire that you may want to copy and use; or you may wish to use it as a guide to tailor one to your specific course. A less formal way to get written feedback from your students is to pass out paper and have them write down what they like about the class, what they don't like about the class, and suggestions for change. This latter method can be used two or three times during the semester and can also be used to evaluate a particular class session about which you would like evaluative information.
- (2) *Use Midterm Student Feedback (MSF).* A MSF involves the use of small group discussions among students about the strengths of the course and any changes that would assist their learning. The instructor arranges to have a CRLT consultant visit the class sometime early in the term. The consultant arrives at the beginning of the class and observes until there

are approximately 25 minutes left. At that time, the instructor turns the class over to the consultant and leaves the room. The consultant explains the procedure and its purpose and then divides the class into groups of four or five students. Each group receives a sheet with the following questions:

- a. List the major strengths of this discussion section/lab. (What is helping you learn in this section/lab?) Please explain briefly or give an example for each strength.
- b. List changes that could be made in the section/lab to assist you in learning.

Students are asked to discuss each of these questions in their groups. The groups then share their responses with the whole class, and the consultant clarifies and records responses.

Soon after the feedback session (preferably before the class meets again), the consultant meets with the instructor to share the students' comments and his or her observations. They discuss possible actions the instructor might take in response to the feedback. The instructor also receives a written report of the student feedback. The process is confidential. Please call 734-764-0505 or email crlt@umich.edu to schedule a MSF.

Self Reflection

Keeping a teaching journal can be a useful tool to help you reflect on your teaching and can assist you as you work to develop your own personal teaching style. Following are some ways you might use such a journal:

- As you are planning your instruction, write in your journal the goals of a class session and how you plan to reach those goals. If you articulate what you want students to be able to do after a particular class period, it will help you design more effective instruction.
- Immediately after a class session, reflect on whether you reached the goals, what worked, what didn't work as well as you would like, and alternative things you might try another time. Also write down anything you learned: e.g., observations about a particular student, a combination of students in small groups that worked well, or something that you learned about yourself as a teacher.
- You might also record in your journal any ideas about teaching gained by talking to other GSIs, from classes you attend as a graduate student, or by attending workshops on teaching. Relating these ideas to your own teaching can assist you in becoming an effective teacher.

Peer Observation

Having another GSI sit in on a class period can be a rich source of information. As an observer, this person often can help you understand the dynamics of your classroom. Many GSIs find it beneficial to pair up with another GSI and sit in on each other's classes--this paves the way for discussion about teaching that can be beneficial to both GSIs.

Videotapes and Consultation

One of the most powerful and helpful forms of feedback on your teaching can be the viewing of a videotape of one of your class sessions. It will give you information on your teaching unavailable any other way—it will help you see yourself as others see you. Viewing the tape with a consultant can be even more useful. A consultant can help you see the whole picture, assist you in focusing on your behaviors that facilitate student learning and stimulate a discussion about alternative ways of approaching aspects of your teaching that you would like to change. Staff members at CRLT

are available to videotape your classroom and consult with you as you view your tape. These sessions are confidential and, if you would like, the videotape will be erased. If you would prefer, a staff member can sit in on your class without videotaping and then discuss the observations with you. Please call 734-764-0505 or email crlt@umich.edu to schedule a videotaping or consultation with a CRLT staff member. *Other resources for consultation include the course instructor or other departmental personnel.*

Whatever form of feedback you choose to receive from your students, it is useful to get someone else to help you assess the comments and discuss different possibilities of responding to suggestions made by the students. In a study at the University of Michigan (McKeachie et al., 1980), instructors who received student ratings in conjunction with counseling that provided encouragement and suggested alternative teaching strategies tended to change their classroom behaviors more than did those who received only student ratings. A CRLT consultant is available for discussion of student feedback.

References

McKeachie, W.J., Lin, Y-G., Daugherty, M., Moffett, M., Neigler, C., Nork, J., Walz, M., and Baldwin, R. (1980). Using student ratings and consultation to improve instruction. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 50, 168-174.

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