

Faculty Forum



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Asking the Right Questions at the Right Time



“Mid-course evaluations improve student feedback and can help improve the course”

Assessment is a two-way street. As instructors, we've known for a long time that our students benefit from timely feedback to their attempts at demonstrating what they have learned. And if feedback should be timely, why do we so often wait until the end of a semester before we ask our students about the quality of our teaching?

One major step toward improvement of student feedback is the use of mid-course evaluations (available with Flashlight-ed.). The driving force for these must usually be self-motivated on the part of the instructor, because

many institutions seem to care only about the standardized end-of-semester evaluation. But end-of-semester evaluations won't help fix a problem for the existing semester. Mid-course evaluations, on the other hand, make it possible to catch problems before they ruin an entire semester's work. Another advantage of mid-course evaluations over end-of-semester evaluations is that the student is less likely to mentally associate the evaluation activity with the student's own expectation of his or her final grade.

If having your students evaluate your teaching

in mid-course is the right time, what are the right questions?

I discovered the answer to this myself through a process of trial and error. The first trial was during the 2003 Fall semester, using Flashlight Online to survey 22 library science graduate students. Of the 10 questions I asked, 5 were fairly open-ended, while 5 could be answered by "yes" or "no".

Therein was the problem. Give someone the option of answering "yes" or "no", and they'll take you up on it. "No" doesn't usually tell you what was really >>

Are We Different?

“Our expectations of students are higher than those we impose on ourselves...”

Are we different from our students? As academics we spend a lot of time illuminating the inadequacies of students and the difficulties they present when we teach; late assessment items, need for 'spoon feeding', complaints about workload, tardiness, students who don't participate, disruptive students etc. These obstacles to learning, I

think, are also displayed when we as lecturers become the student (e.g., staff development workshops etc). I think the lesson is that we should have greater understanding of these obstacles and become more flexible and tolerant. It is interesting that, as a group, our expectations of students are higher than the expectations we impose on our-

selves.

I think it is interesting to hear how each of us sees ourselves in relation to our students. Are we empowered? Many see students as subordinate and you hear phrases like "my way or the highway" or "there is one way to do it and that's my way" type comments. What model do we apply to our class dynamic? >>

UPDATE!

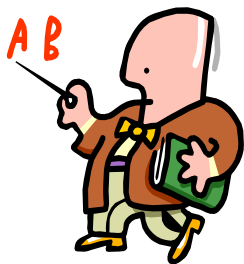
2006 Faculty Club Luncheons MOVING to Room with a VIEW

Monday, January 30,
Arguing in the Classroom: Validity, Values, Pedagogy
A multidisciplinary panel on how to address and use controversy in higher education.

Tentative date/speaker: YET TO BE CONFIRMED:
Monday, February 20
Learning and Teaching,
David Pace, Co-Director,
Lilly Freshman Learning Project, Indiana University

TO BE ANNOUNCED:
Monday, March 20
Monday, April 17

RESERVATIONS for all CIE events @ www.calumet.purdue.edu/cie



“Don’t wait until the end of the semester to find out how you’re doing”

On-line Journals:

Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

<http://titans.iusb.edu/josotl/>

Inventio

www.doiit.gmu.edu/inventio/

MountainRise:

<http://mountainrise.wcu.edu/>

Networks:

<http://education.ucsc.edu/faculty/gwells/networks/links.html>



CIE website:

www.calumet.purdue.edu/cie

Comments to:

artz@calumet.purdue.edu

>The Right Questions

>> wrong, and “yes” doesn’t really tell you what you were doing right.

In the 2004 Spring semester, I repeated the survey in a different graduate-level class, replacing the yes/no questions with more elaborate questions. One quick example: I replaced “Do you feel that the instructor is knowledgeable concerning the subject matter?” with “Which areas of the course do you feel that the instructor appears to be most knowledgeable about, and which areas least knowledgeable about?”

The answers were far more enlightening!

Lessons to be learned:

1. Don't wait until end of semester to find out how you're doing.
2. Yes/no questions have little feedback value for purposes of improving your teaching.
3. You won't get your survey instrument "perfect" the first time you use it.

(Drew Smith, “Asking the Right Questions at the Right Time,” *F-LIGHT*, June 2004, accessed on-line at <http://www.tltgroup.org/Resources/F-LIGHT/2004/06-04.html>)

7 Principles of Good Teaching Practice

1. ENCOURAGES STUDENT – FACULTY CONTACT
2. ENCOURAGES COOPERATION AMONG STUDENTS
3. ENCOURAGES ACTIVE LEARNING
4. GIVES PROMPT FEEDBACK
5. EMPHASIZES TIME ON TASK
6. COMMUNICATES HIGH EXPECTATIONS
7. RESPECTS DIVERSE TALENTS AND WAYS OF LEARNING

From *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*, Arthur W. Chickering and Zelda F. Gamson.

Essay available On-line at <http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/7princip.htm>

RECOMMENDED READING:

**Reinventing Undergraduate Education:
A Blueprint for America’s Research Universities**
@ <http://naples.cc.sunysb.edu/Pres/boyer.nsf>

>Useful contact information:

Library: 989-2224

Academic Affairs: 989-2446

Technology help desk: 989-2888

User Services: Jeff Schieb, 989-4186

Faculty Development: Janice Tazbir, 989-2857

Office of Research and Professional Development:

George Hong/Terri Szot-Chance, CLO 176, 989-2925

Center for Instructional Excellence (cie):

Lee Artz, 989-3264 or 989-2393

>Different?

In health we traditionally have a delegated decision making model for doctor/patient relationships where the doctor is the authority and the patient plays a passive role in their own health management. In recent years, I guess in part as a consequence of the information age and our expectations and the advantages of patient education (e.g., compliance), the health model has moved away from this to one where the patient plays an integral role, as an informed party, in their health management. Education is or should be undergoing similar transitions - empowerment of students.

Clearly, there are many strategies that can be employed in teaching/learning but there should be an appropriate balance. I teach students to challenge authority to gain a deeper understanding of key concepts and utilize student driven learning strategies. Quality assurance and quality improvement programs are a valuable tool in any process, but their usefulness is limited if the process is not continuous. Continually striving to improve and increase quality provides a mechanism for ongoing competitive advantage.

I find my final thought in “Jerry Maguire,” a movie with a similar theme. It should be us, as career educators, who say to our students [as Jerry says to his trusty sidekick in the movie] and thus define the dynamics of our relationships: “You complete me.”

Excerpted from:

Geoff Currie, “The Student/Teacher Partnership,” *Mountain Rise* 2.2 (2005)