

Teaching

A series of practical and innovative teaching tips for college faculty No. 9

The Top 10...

Ways to Get Feedback on Teaching from Students

We know what we are doing when we teach, but how are students experiencing it? Does how we teach actually help students in a particular course learn? Stop guessing and start getting information from the experts: your students.

- ✓ **Keep it simple.** Ask students no more than three questions that focus directly on how **they experience** your teaching. If you want feedback on your teaching in general, for example try these “One **big** thing that you do that really helps me learn is...” “One **little** thing that you do that really helps me learn is ...” and “One thing that you do that gets in the way of my learning is ...”
- ✓ **Tell students that you are using their feedback to better target your teaching to their particular needs.** Targeting instruction is the mark of an excellent teacher! This also gives them a reason to give you honest feedback. For example, perhaps you need feedback on **how you provide feedback** on their papers, or quizzes, or team assignments. Keep the questions open-ended, such as “Your feedback on my papers is ...” and “One thing that you could do when providing feedback to me on my papers is ...”
- ✓ **Compile responses quickly, review with the class, and tell them how it will affect your instruction.** Within a week compile the results and share them with the class. This demonstrates your commitment to using their information. Sharing how you are modifying your instruction based upon their feedback motivates them to provide future constructive feedback.
- ✓ **Keep questions open-ended unless you *really need* targeted feedback.** Asking students “The best thing about the course site on Blackboard is ...” “One thing that would make the course site on Blackboard more effective for me is ...” gives you the broadest information. Follow up with specific questions later.

- ✓ **Stick to one subject.** Mixing subjects, for example asking questions about the online discussion segment of your course along with how you assign small group projects will produce confusion and less significant input on both. Select the area of instruction that will have the most impact. Remember, quick and simple!
- ✓ **Ask for specific information about how they personally experience your instruction.** Teach them what “specific” means. For example if you are asking about how you end a lesson, the response “I like the way you end class” is not as helpful as “having us summarize the 3 key parts of the lesson with a partner helps me focus and gives me another perspective.”
- ✓ **Ask *at least* twice during the course.** You get feedback, mention how it will affect your teaching, make the changes (or at least think you do), and now you need feedback to see if your changes work! Doing this during the semester allows you to make adjustments for the students who are providing the feedback.
- ✓ **Consider dual purpose feedback.** This feedback provides you with information *and* helps students think about some aspect of the course. For example, after a test ask “My biggest surprise on the test was ...” “One thing that I plan to differently to prepare for the next test is ...” and “The best thing about the test was ...” You can ask exactly the same type of question about papers, or significant team assignments. In their responses, you are looking for patterns that indicate areas where you can help them as a group. For this type of feedback only, having them include their names is important because you can return their answers to use for personal improvement.
- ✓ **Consider asking about “best practices” from other instructors.** Students take courses from others, and you can benefit from this. Ask, for example, “One **big thing** that another teacher does that really helps me learn is ...” and “One **little thing** that another teacher does that really helps me learn is ...” It is probably best not to ask for instructor names.
- ✓ **Improving feedback to you.** Providing students with everyone’s feedback and then having small groups rank the top five comments under each question may provide surprising results. Sometimes only one student mentions something, but when all see and discuss it, many agree.