

What to do with the information you gather on a midsemester evaluation

A midsemester evaluation is good in and of itself--it gives you feedback and reminds the students that you are interested in what and how they are learning. However, you will also want to report back to your students on the evaluation itself: it lets students know that you have considered what they have said; it helps students to see that not everyone in the course may feel the same way they do; and it reinforces for students that filling out evaluation forms thoughtfully is appreciated and valued. Here are some tips on responding to students' feedback.

Respond quickly to students' feedback. Ideally, you will want to respond to your students' comments as soon as feasible. So schedule mid-semester activities at those times during the term when you will have the opportunity to immediately review the class's comments.

Consider carefully what students say. First, look over the positive things your students have said about the course. This is important because it is too easy to get swayed by negative comments. Then read their suggestions for improvement and group them into three categories:

- Those you can change this semester (for example, the turnaround time on homework assignments)
- Those that must wait until the next time the course is offered (for example, the textbook)
- Those that you either cannot or, for pedagogical reasons, will not change (for example, the number of quizzes or tests)

You may want to ask a colleague or a teaching consultant from the Office of Educational Development to help you identify options for making changes.

Let students know what, if anything, will change as a result of their feedback. Thank your students for their comments and invite their ongoing participation in helping you improve the course. Students appreciate knowing that an instructor has carefully considered what they have said. Clarify any confusions or misunderstandings about your goals and their expectations. Then give a brief account of which of their suggestions you will act upon this term, which must wait until the course is next offered, and which you will not act upon and why. Let students know what they can do as well. For example, if students report that they are often confused, invite them to ask questions more often. Keep your tone and attitude neutral; avoid being defensive, indignant, or unduly apologetic.

Select a method for responding to student feedback that works for you. Most faculty simply discuss the results with the class as a whole. At least one faculty member provides a handout of salient responses to questions, deleting those that are clearly idiosyncratic (e.g., if there is just one comment that says "this classroom is too hot.")

Another faculty member does a short PowerPoint presentation, complete with graphs and charts of responses. Other faculty post summary responses on blackboard so students can see what others have written. Whichever method you select, the most important factor in responding is to do so thoughtfully, and in a timely fashion.

(Adapted by Barbara Davis and Steve Tollefson from *Tools for Teaching*, Jossey-Bass, 2001)

available at <http://teaching.berkeley.edu/respond.html>