

Gathering and utilizing student feedback is essential to ensuring that the courses you teach are facilitating learning and that your content and teaching styles are constantly evolving with the students. In McKeachie's Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers, authors Marilla Svinicki and Wilbert J. McKeachie provide tips on how to gather student feedback and how to use it to improve your course content or teaching style.

**1. Tailor the questionnaire to your course** – Institutions often provide a standard form that can be used in any class, regardless of discipline or size. Add additional questions or update this form so that it's more beneficial and relevant to your course. Choose items that will be useful to you. Open-ended questions are often the most beneficial, as they allow students to provide detailed, well thought-out answers. For example, ask the students: "What aspects of the course have you liked so far?" or "What would you change in this course to improve your learning?" **Short evaluations such as these can be giving as frequently as needed, including at the conclusion of each unit of study in the course. Do not wait or rely solely on the college-wide survey for improvement.**

**2. Analyze student performance** – Gain student feedback through *their performance* in the course. **The ultimate test of your teaching abilities is how much your students learn.** Your job as an instructor is to make learning possible. **Students will perform better in class when they are motivated to learn.** This can be achieved by supplying students with learning materials that are effective at motivating them. Students achieving in your course is one of the best forms of feedback you can receive. **This is precisely why the emphasis is on student learning (success rates and SLO attainment). EVERY study concludes that the teacher is the most important aspect of a person's learning, with the most important factor in student learning being the quality of teaching.**

**3. Don't feel that you have to wait until the end of the course to gain feedback** – The end-of-term is the most crucial time to gather student's thoughts, as they can look back at the semester as a whole, but don't feel like it's the only time you can administer a survey. **Collect rankings and student feedback around the fourth week of the term, therefore you can administer some changes in the course that will help your current students.** After reviewing the feedback, be open and honest with the students and explain what suggestions you are or are not going to implement in the course *and why*. **This is an excellent strategy to implement BEFORE the college-wide evaluations are sent to students, giving you time to show students how you value their perception and are willing to try things that may be out of your comfort zone. This is especially important considering the fact that we are constantly requiring students to operate out of their comfort zone (lead by example).**

**4. Elect and then meet with student representatives** – If you're teaching a large course and are unable to connect with each student, ask your students to choose two or three student representatives to meet with you to provide feedback. These representatives should be available to all students in the class, so that they can get a general pulse of the classroom. During your meeting the student representatives will be more open about feedback, as they'll be expressing opinions of others. Don't stop at finding out the positives and negatives; ask these students how they would solve the issues and what they would do to continue with the positives aspects. **This shows students you are willing to practice what you teach....being open to new ideas, willing to step out of your comfort zone, being prepared for class, and a true concern for student learning.**

**5. Consult with a peer** – Discuss the feedback you were provided with a peer. If you discuss the ratings from the students, you will be able to put the feedback into perspective. Your peer, who is less familiar with your students or course, will be able to shed light on both the positives and negatives that the students provide. **Your fellow instructor**

can give suggestions on how to change areas that need improvement, and they will also offer support and encouragement while reading through the negative comments.

**Collecting student feedback and applying it to your courses will allow students to learn more effectively. Their increased enthusiasm over class concepts will make teaching more enjoyable, therefore compelling you to be the best instructor you can be.** The key to improvement using student feedback is to avoid

responding defensively (*although this is the 'instinctive' response*) by stating what you are currently doing. If the data and feedback show a need to improve an area, then your current techniques need to be adjusted to improve their effectiveness. Having the data for divisional averages, as well as college averages, allows you to objectively put your data into perspective. This helps prevent the common justification of results by applying a subjective analysis, as opposed to an objective analysis of data.

Remember.... There is only one chance to make a **first impression**, and yours will be the **first day** of class. Be *overly* prepared, *overly* positive, and *overly* supportive, while providing crystal clear clarity on the students' responsibilities, *as well as yours*. One way to ensure this is to provide a *very low-stakes, simple assignment* at the very beginning of the course. **Do not accept anything less than 100% completion from all students**, while identifying the more at-risk students and determining any factors that may be limiting their completion. If you state you expect two complete sentences as a response, accept nothing less or nothing more than two complete sentences, while providing a positive and supportive demeanor (*"Say what you mean and mean what you say, but don't be mean in saying it"*).

Keep in mind that many of our students have been trained over the years that they do not have to do everything that is required of them. Our focus on this first low-stakes assignment is on *teaching* responsible behavior (*following directions*) and not on punishment. If we tell students they need to complete something (*course evals*) and then we do not follow-up on ensuring their compliance, we are essentially teaching them that they do not need to always follow our instructions.

**Thank you all for your efforts to apply a constructive approach to your course evaluations (student feedback) this past semester!** I do realize that for some, this may have been the first time you have used this instrument to improve perceptions of the learning environment. Although this self-evaluation may be the most difficult emotionally when first attempted, it is by far the quickest and most effective way to improve student learning/success. **This student perception of the learning environment is one of the most important variables associated with student learning and student success, especially for the more at-risk students.**