

Best Practices for Obtaining Teaching and Course Feedback

In their report, the Teaching Evaluation Task Force recommends, "that the primary purpose of the instrument should be to collect information for formative assessments (that is, information that can help improve our work as teachers)." For this reason, using suggestions made in the report:

- the title now suggests this is a tool to gather feedback,
- the instructions emphasize that the principal function of the new instrument is to help instructors "reflect upon and improve their teaching and to revise their courses," and
- the qualitative questions include language from the Faculty Handbook's criteria for excellent teaching.

To help this tool serve its primary function, the following practices for obtaining feedback are recommended.

Take advantage of resources provided by Provost's office

<http://www.plu.edu/provost/courseevaluations/faculty/>

Use online tutorials on EvaluationKIT system

From your EvaluationKIT homepage, click on the **?** icon in the upper right hand corner.

Provide students with information about the process and how feedback is used.

According to research done by the Teaching Evaluation Task Force and the Rank and Tenure Committee, a substantial number of students do not understand the value or use of feedback forms. Many are unsure what happens to the forms after they are completed, and they are unsure if instructors actually use their comments. Students also noted that, because the forms were completed at the end of the term, any resulting changes would never benefit them, and many felt that feedback is not crucial if the course went well.

To change this notion, it is important to inform students of what happens with the information after the form is completion. It can help if you explain that their feedback significantly aids you, and other instructors, in the review and redesign of their course for future students. Though the feedback may not seem beneficial to this group in particular, the feedback from past groups *did* benefit this current

group. Let them know that it is critically important to learn what went well, in addition to other kinds of feedback, in order to repeat aspects of the course and approaches to teaching that supported positive student learning.

Explain how you respond to feedback.

Because many students are unsure if their comments go anywhere, let them know how you respond to their feedback. It can help them to know your process for reviewing, processing, and implementing their feedback. At PLU, we stress the value of thoughtful inquiry, care, leadership, and service; it can help students to know that instructors keep these values in mind as they read through the comments and consider ways to evolve their courses for future students, and that they themselves are a part of a cyclical process in which previous classes have participated.

Discuss the process with students before the end of the semester.

Prior to students receiving the feedback form online, speak with them about the forms and their uses. Instructors intending students to complete the form in class might let students know their intentions well before the forms are released.

When you receive the email indicating that the feedback forms will soon be released through EvaluationKIT, email students to let them know your plans for their completion. This will help students know which instructors want the form completed in class and which do not. As a courtesy to colleagues, instructors might include a note saying that instructors vary in ways they prefer students complete the form, but for this class they will be completed in class or out of class. This helps to ensure students do not complete forms in the same manner for all of their classes.

Consider providing class time to encourage participation.

Research shows many benefits to having students complete the feedback form in class. As the Teaching Evaluation Task Force Report indicates, "The highest response rates for electronic evaluations come from assessments administered in-class." Beyond this, committing class time can emphasize the value the instructor places on receiving feedback. Beyond this, completing the form in the same space where lectures, discussions and other activities occurred can help students to recall concrete examples of their classroom experiences. Having students reflect on the term and write down their thoughts about the course while in the same learning space where the class occurred can make this activity an integral tool for their overall learning experience, especially if instructors emphasize it as such.

According to section on "Teaching and Course Feedback Forms" in the Faculty Handbook (Part VII. Other Policies, Section 3. Instructional Responsibilities and Course Procedures, G.1.a): "Where possible, the teaching and course feedback form will be completed in class, with adequate time allowed by the instructor. If completed in class, the instructor shall leave the room until the teaching and course feedback forms have been completed. If in-class administration of the teaching and course feedback form is not possible, students may complete the evaluation outside of class."

Provide reminders to students to increase response rate.

Research suggests that when students complete feedback forms outside of class the response rates can drop substantially. Instructors who prefer students complete the form outside of class can help ensure a high response rate by sending reminders in addition to those sent by the EvaluationKIT system.

Obtain mid-term feedback.

The Teaching Evaluation Task Force Report recommends "the adoption of mid-course feedback for two reasons. First, past research shows the declines in response rates that typically occur with a shift to electronic evaluations can be mitigated with this practice. Second, soliciting mid-course feedback is in line with our recommendation that the feedback process be utilized for formative assessment. Mid-course feedback can foster our professional development as teachers, provide concrete opportunities for mentoring, and improve the learning experience for students while the course is still in session."