Collecting and Responding to Early Student Feedback

Weeks three, four, or five of the quarter are a good time to collect early feedback from students on how their learning is progressing. Early feedback from students at this point in the quarter helps to identify what is working well in your course(s), as well as challenges or concerns students have. Often, at this point in the quarter, students reveal challenges they may not otherwise have shared that can be acted upon fairly easily. There are a few ways you can collect student feedback:

1) **Get one-on-one support from an Education Specialist.**
   Request support from an Education Specialist in the Teaching + Learning Commons Engaged Teaching Hub who can provide consultation on survey questions, collect and summarize student feedback, and provide guidance on responding effectively to the feedback. We can host an anonymous survey for you and provide summary results to you; or we can help you to adapt a survey of your own. (Click to request a consultation).

2) **Create your own tool to ask students what's working well for them in the course, and what they might be finding challenging.**
   Create a Google survey or an anonymous Canvas survey with open-ended questions, embed the link in an announcement in Canvas, and encourage students to fill it out. If you have time during lecture or another synchronous meeting to have students fill the survey out, this can be a good strategy for raising response rates. We recommend questions that focus on student agency in monitoring their learning environment. We have found these questions to be effective. (Please email us if you would like support with adapting a survey in Canvas or Google forms: engagedteaching@ucsd.edu).

3) **Encourage students to reflect on their own challenges and to seek support.**
   Whether you choose to work with an Education Specialist or design your own feedback tool, this point in the quarter is also a good time for students to check in with their own learning and consider what changes they might wish to make going forward. We encourage you to include a question in your survey that asks students to reflect on what they could do to enhance their learning in your course, and to address these ideas in your response to the student feedback you collect.

Responding to Student Feedback

Collecting student feedback provides you with important information about student learning in your course(s). Communicating with students about how you will be responding to that feedback demonstrates your concern for student learning, and brings students into the course as partners in creating a productive educational environment. Below, we share an email template for responding to student feedback, and you may also wish to briefly address student feedback in your synchronous meetings (lectures), if you are holding them.

Sample Response Email Template

Dear Students,	
Thank you for taking the time to fill out the survey about your learning experiences in the course so far.	← Show appreciation for the time students took to share honest, constructive feedback.
I was pleased to learn that the pre-recorded lectures are helpful and that you are able to follow the structure of the course in Canvas. I also appreciated learning about some of your concerns about the course, such as feeling unsure about how to study for the exam, and needing more guidance in the TA office hours.	← Highlight a couple of key takeaways from their feedback.
I will post more information about this on our Discussion Board. Regarding the Discussion Board, please continue to use that forum to ask questions. Often if you have a question, it is likely that others will as well.	← Let students know which feedback you are able to address and what you plan to do. Also let them know what changes they recommended that you won't change, and why. For example, students may say they don't like the weekly quizzes because they take too much time. This would be a good opportunity to explain the purpose of the quizzes and why they are essential to their success.
In your responses to the survey questions, several of you shared personal challenges you are facing as a result of the pandemic. I want you to know that your persistence, despite incredibly challenging circumstances, is both inspiring and humbling. Please know that I, and the UC San Diego community, care about your wellbeing.	← Acknowledge personal challenges students have shared and provide them
Below are several campus resources that are available to you. The need for support is common under normal circumstances, and even more so as we navigate life during a pandemic. I hope you will take advantage of these helpful services.	

with resources that may be helpful.

We are already almost halfway through the quarter. Let's keep up our momentum!

Sincerely,

Interpreting Student Feedback

Interpreting student feedback can present some challenges. For example, it is common to receive contradictory feedback from students (perhaps receiving comments that the pace is both too fast and too slow). Or, students might suggest changes that are out of your control. Below, we share a few brief guidelines for interpreting student feedback. Our Education Specialists are also available to assist in interpreting student feedback, including both informal mid-quarter feedback and CAPEs. Please feel free to sign up for a consultation or reach out to us with questions at engagedteaching@ucsd.edu. We are here to support you however we can.

1) **Look for trends; consider outliers**
   Are there suggestions that many of your students agree upon? It makes sense to focus first on addressing concerns that many students share. At the same time, it is also important to use your judgment in considering single comments. If only one or two students suggest a simple fix - for example, captioning videos, or sharing the main topic of the lecture at the beginning of each class - these are also worth implementing. Similarly, if a small number of students share concerning information (for example, feeling that the class is an unfriendly environment), these are issues you will want to address.

2) **Put student feedback together with your own sense of the class**
   Students may make suggestions that you are not able or willing to implement, for various reasons. Collecting student feedback does not obligate you to make the exact changes students suggest, but it can be worth thinking about what lies at the root of their feedback and how you could address their concerns. For example, if they want you to podcast your lecture but your room does not support that feature, is it because they are struggling to keep up with note-taking? Is there another support, such as

providing skeleton notes, slides that they can annotate, or doing more verbal signposting of which concepts are most important, that you could implement instead?

Resolving contradictory feedback might also require some further interpretation or information. For example, does the course have students from different majors present, or do students take it at very different stages in the curriculum? Are there ways you can support students who might not be majors in your field by diversifying the examples you use to illustrate concepts in lecture, or directing students to supplementary videos?

3) **Make a list for now and a list for later**
It is not always possible to alter fundamental aspects of a course mid-stream (for example, choosing a new textbook mid-quarter would impose a financial burden on students and could cause frustration). Make a list for yourself of ideas you want to implement now, and keep track of the other suggestions for your next offering of the course.

Documenting Teaching Effectiveness

Collecting and responding to student feedback is one way for you to demonstrate your concern for student learning and your dedication to continuous improvement as an educator. Keep student feedback and your responses together in a safe place, and consider integrating a reflection on your response into a teaching portfolio or statement. For more information on documenting teaching effectiveness, please contact us.