

# Mid-semester Feedback on Teaching and Learning

At the mid-point in the semester, you may wish to take stock of how your courses are going. This can take a variety of forms: gathering feedback on your teaching, prompting reflection on the experience of teaching or learning in the course, or assessing students' learning through exams or other activities.

## Feedback on Teaching

Collecting informal feedback on your teaching or on activities conducted in the course can be a good way to check in on the progress of your students and make improvements where you see fit. (See Selected Reading list for literature on this.) This kind of feedback can be solicited through student surveys, teaching observations (either peer or consultant-based), or open discussions with your AIs or even your students.

### Student Surveys

To get feedback on student perceptions of your teaching, you might administer a mid-semester evaluation survey. This can be as open and general as asking the students: What's working well for you in this course? What could be improved?

A mid-semester survey can also be more specific and focused, asking direct questions about specific aspects of the course, such as Zoom lectures or group projects and assignments. Sample questions are located at the end of this document. It is recommended that you select or craft a small number of thoughtful questions that will not require more than 5-10 minutes of your students' time.

In order for students to feel comfortable giving candid feedback, *surveys should be completed anonymously*. Students should *never* be encouraged to list their name or identifying information (such as project or paper specifics that would let you know who they are) on any feedback or evaluation survey you administer. In some cases, student identity may need to be collected for research purposes. If you think you have a situation that would require such information, or if you need guidance on crafting survey questions, please contact Kelly Godfrey, Assistant Director of Educational and Program Assessment at the McGraw Center at [kellygb@princeton.edu](mailto:kellygb@princeton.edu).

There are several tools available to you for gathering feedback from your students. You can use [Google Forms](#), an online survey platform such as [Qualtrics](#) (access provided by the university), or your course's LMS ([BlackBoard](#) or Canvas<sup>1</sup>). It may be necessary to

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<sup>1</sup> If your course is on Canvas, consult with your Instructional Designer from the McGraw Center to post a survey on Canvas.

create your survey as “optional” for all students so that it remains anonymous and no identifying information is tracked.

Keep in mind that, at the mid-semester point, you will only be able to make reasonable changes to your course. It is important to keep this in mind when composing questions to ask students. You may wish to debrief with your students after you have collected and synthesized their feedback. Having an open and frank discussion about what you can and cannot change and how the course is going may be beneficial to you and your students in developing an understanding of teaching and learning in your course. This discussion may be especially valuable during virtual teaching.

### Teaching Observations

Another approach to get feedback on teaching is through peer observation. Peer observation is “a collegial process whereby two faculty members voluntarily work together to improve or expand their capabilities and approaches to teaching” (Fletcher, 2017). Peer observation can be evaluative, but it can also be developmental or collaborative. For more information, see “Peer Observation of Teaching: A Practical Tool in Higher Education” (2017) by J. A. Fletcher, *Journal of Faculty Development*, 32(1), located here:

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/ce17/9540a21e302ce394db73214710aa8f824561.pdf>.

An interesting thought-piece on the value of peer observation for the improvement of one’s own teaching is “Peer Observation: Learning from One Another” by M. O. Richardson (2000), located here:

[http://www.nea.org/assets/img/PubThoughtAndAction/TAA\\_00Sum\\_02.pdf](http://www.nea.org/assets/img/PubThoughtAndAction/TAA_00Sum_02.pdf)

Your colleague(s) should be able to sit in on Zoom meetings with little to no interference, but you may need to introduce them and explain the purpose of their visit just as you would in a face-to-face class meeting. You may also wish to invite them to observe discussion board posts or watch asynchronous videos you have prepared for your students, and we encourage you to share other resources you are using as well as assignments and activities for pedagogical discussion.

You may also wish to seek instructional feedback from a consultant at the McGraw Center. At any point in the semester, you can schedule a non-evaluative instructional consultation or teaching observation by emailing Kate Stanton, Director of the McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning and Associate Dean, Office of the Dean of the College at [kstanton@princeton.edu](mailto:kstanton@princeton.edu).

## Discussions with AIs and Students

If you have not already done so, now is likely a good time to meet with the course's AIs to discuss students' progress thus far, how virtual teaching appears to be going, grading procedures, activities, etc. Depending on the role of your AIs, they may have keen insights not only on how students are performing, but also on what content the students are struggling with or where they need more resources. This is also a good time to revisit your grading procedures and expectations to ensure that everyone is aligned to the same standards.

In some cases, you may wish to meet with the enrolled students in your class, either individually or as an open group. Although this approach does not maintain the anonymity of the students, it may be appropriate in seminars or advanced courses with small enrollments and students who work more closely with each other and with you as the instructor. Checking in on how they are doing, how they are preparing for the course each week, and where they feel most or least confident may give you key insights into how virtual teaching and learning are happening in your course. These can be conducted via Zoom and can even take place during normal class meeting time. It is recommended that you take notes, but do not record the meeting in order to encourage students to speak more openly.

## Assessing Student Learning

Midterm exams are a common and traditional method of formally assessing student learning. However, you may wish to assess students' learning through alternative, more informal, methods. Some suggestions include:

- Administer a "one-minute paper" at the end of a class meeting. Ask your students to write a response to a specific question, describe the most important idea they learned in that class, or identify a question that remains unanswered. These can be submitted via email, your course's LMS, or via discussion boards.
- At the end of class, ask students to identify the "muddiest point" from a lecture or discussion.
- Ask students to write a short definition of a key term at the beginning and end of a class.
- Instruct students to write a short list of pros and cons, costs or benefits, or advantages or disadvantages for making a particular choice or decision.

- Assign a “one-sentence summary” of a particular argument or concept at the end of class.
- Ask students to connect general principles and specific examples, or underlying concepts and specific problems, from a short list.

For further reading on approaches like the ones listed here, see Angelo and Cross, *Classroom Assessment Techniques*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993. Additional approaches specific to virtual teaching and learning are found in Darby and Lang, *Small Teaching Online*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2019.

## Self-Reflection

Around this time of the semester, you and your students may benefit from self-reflection. Encouraging students to reflect on how they are doing in the class, where they are performing well and what needs more work, can help provide some clarity and insights into what would make the second half the semester a success. By now, most students have received some assessment feedback in the form of graded or evaluated materials. This may be a good time to discuss progress, understanding of expectations, learning strategies, and so on. For more on this, see: McGuire and McGuire, *Teach Students How to Learn*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2015.

## Sample Survey Questions: Course Content

Construct	Question Options
Assignments	How helpful are the assignments to your learning in the course? [1 = not at all helpful to 5 = extremely helpful]
	How have the assignments contributed to your learning in the course? Does anything stand out as particularly helpful? [open]
Workload	How much is the workload in this course compared to your expectations? [A lot less than expected to A lot more than expected]
	How is the workload in this course? Is it what you expected? [open]
	On average, how many hours per week are you spending on this course outside of class time? [number]
Anything confusing or unclear	Is there anything confusing or unclear in this course? What is it? [open]
	What is causing you the most difficulty in this course? Are there any specific concepts that are causing difficulty, or anything regarding the virtual format that could be addressed? [open]
Particularly interesting content	What has been the most interesting thing you have learned so far? [open]
	What are you most interested in learning in the next half of the course? [open]
Most important thing learned	What is the most important thing you've learned so far? [open]
Values	How has this course impacted your view of the world around you? [open]
Prediction	What do you predict will be particularly challenging in the remaining half of the semester? [open]

## Sample Survey Questions: Virtual Instruction

Construct	Question Options
Communication	How is the level and quality of communication in this course? [1 = way too little; 3 = just right; 5 = way too much]
	How has communication been in this course? Are there any improvements that can be made, especially during virtual learning? [open]
Engagement	How does the virtual format of this course affect your level of engagement in the content? [1 = greatly negatively impacts my engagement to 5 = greatly positively impacts engagement]
	How engaged do you feel in this course? How does the virtual format support or challenge your engagement? [open]
Task/ Assignment Instructions	How clear are [assignment] instructions in this course? [1 = not at all clear to 5 = very clear]
	What do you think about [assignment] instructions in this course? Are assignments and expectations clear? Could anything be improved? [open]
Expectations	How clear are participation and performance expectations in this course? [1 = not at all clear to 5 = very clear]
	How would you describe the clarity of the instructor's participation and performance expectations in this course? Do you feel confident in your understanding of what's expected? [open]
Quality of feedback	How helpful is the feedback you receive from the instructor(s) in this course? [1 = not at all helpful to 5 = extremely helpful]
	How helpful is the feedback you receive from the instructor(s) in this course? What improvements would you like to see? [open]
Pace of the course/ lectures/ discussions	How is the pace of [X] in this class? [1 = too slow; 3 = just right; 5 = too fast]
	How is the pace of [X] in this class? Are they too fast, too slow, or just right? Please explain. [open]
Anything particularly helpful	Has anything in this course been particularly helpful in your learning? What technologies or aspects of this virtual course, if any, have benefited your learning? Please describe. [open]
Community	How strong would you rate the sense of community in this course so far? [1 = no community; 5 = very strong community]

	<p>How is your sense of community in this course? Do you feel connected to the other students? What would help develop more connections? [open]</p>
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