

Early Student Feedback Guide

Early student feedback is a formative way to gather constructive information about course instruction directly from students. Collecting feedback from students at the course midpoint allows, or a little before, allows instructors to capitalize on group- and context-specific perspectives (Cook-Sather, 2009) that enable meaningful enhancements in students' learning experiences (Payette & Brown, 2018).

While midterm feedback is useful for making adjustments to any course "midstream," it is particularly useful when a course has undergone changes, such as moving online (Russell, 2020). It also supports a personal process of reflective teaching and continuous improvement (Peterson, 2016) that is driven by the individual instructor.

Because student feedback is a confidential process, this guide was created to help instructors develop their own practical and effective feedback collection strategy using four steps: (1) Design a survey, (2) collect feedback, (3) analyze feedback, and (4) create an action plan. Click any of the steps below for more detailed information and resources.

Four Steps for Effective Early Student Feedback

1. Design the Survey

- Use the Brightspace Survey tool or Qualtrics to create an anonymous survey.
- Address 2-3 key areas with survey questions: *What aspects of the course are working well? What aspects of the course are impeding student learning? What changes might enhance the course?*

2. Collect Feedback

- Set a timeframe that allows you to gather and use student feedback in a timely way.
- Explain the goal(s) of the survey and why student participation is important.
- Share the survey and send periodic reminders for students to complete it.

3. Analyze Feedback

- Look for themes in both numeric and narrative responses.
- Prioritize ideas and suggestions that are significant for a number of students.

4. Create an Action Plan

- Identify manageable adjustments that will enhance student learning.
- Plan when and how you will make the adjustments.
- Inform students about the adjustments and how their feedback informed your decisions.

Step 1: Design the Survey

Anonymous online surveys are useful for mid-semester feedback because they are generally fast, do not require class time, and can facilitate authentic student responses.

Survey Tools

Brightspace and Qualtrics can be used to administer anonymous online surveys. These tools offer a variety of question formats, including multiple choice, Likert-type, and short- and long-answer. [This short \(< 3 minute\) tutorial](#) demonstrates how to create a Brightspace survey. Alternatively, you can use your Purdue Career Account to access [Qualtrics](#) and contact Purdue IT Services for help.

Survey Questions

Mid-semester survey questions should solicit useful feedback relevant to your course and goals, and generally relate to three topics:

- What aspects of the course are supporting student learning?
- What aspects of the course are making learning difficult?
- What adjustments by the instructor *and* student might enhance learning experiences?

Reflect on the kind of feedback that will be most useful to you in making meaningful adjustments to your course at its midpoint. Focus on 2-3 key areas and use a mix of numeric and open-ended questions to maximize the insights that can be drawn from survey responses. This [question bank](#) offers a variety of categories and items that can be used to build your survey. You can also review these [sample surveys](#) for ideas on how to tailor the survey to your course and goals.

Alternative Approaches to Gathering Feedback

While surveys provide an efficient and effective method for gathering mid-semester feedback, instructors may also engage their students in collaborative discussions to obtain feedback about their courses. In-class discussions, asynchronous discussions, and Small Group Instructional Diagnostics (SGIDs) can generate rich data that fosters highly impactful adjustments to course instruction. Request a [one-on-one consultation](#) if you are interested in using one of these strategies to collect mid-semester feedback.

Step 2: Collect Feedback

When your survey is ready, invite students to complete it. In your communications, include an explanation of your goals for the survey and the type of constructive feedback that will be most

helpful to you. You can use this [example email](#) as a guide. Also consider ways to maximize student participation, including whether you will offer incentives. Some helpful tips include:

- Make it easy, convenient, and time-efficient to complete the survey.
- Make it anonymous.
- Remind students of their shared stake in the results.
- Explain the value of students' perspectives in driving meaningful course adjustments.
- Send reminders through email or announcements.
- Set a time frame that allows you to review and use students' feedback in a timely way.

Step 3: Analyze Feedback

After collecting student responses, analyze feedback to identify opportunities and ideas for meaningful adjustments within the course. Start with numeric responses (e.g. multiple choice, Likert) to gain a broad sense of students' perspectives. Next, review narrative responses for themes. Concentrate on issues that seem significant for a number of students and avoid focusing on outliers. Consider following up with students about any unclear, confusing, or unexpected feedback.

Employ additional resources to inform your analysis. For instance, review student achievement data from the Progress tab in Brightspace. You can also [request a Teaching Fellow consultation](#) for confidential support with interpreting student feedback.

Step 4: Create an Action Plan

Use your analysis of student feedback to develop a manageable plan to enhance students' learning experiences for the remainder of the course. Avoid committing to major or multiple changes. Instead, consider modest changes that have the potential for big impact (Marincovich, 1999). Discuss your ideas with a trusted colleague or [CELT consultant](#) before implementing changes. For each change, identify actionable steps that must be taken to effectively implement the change before the end of the semester.

Be sure to thank students for their feedback and share with them how you plan to use it. Explain the pedagogical rationale for things that were identified in student feedback that you do **not** plan to act on or change. Informing students of how and why you are using their feedback to enhance the course will underscore your commitment to their learning and can positively influence their perceptions of learning and teaching in your course (McGowan & Osguthrope, 2013).

References

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