
**Categories:** Student Evaluation of Teaching, Midterm Feedback, Instructional Improvement, Institutional Reform

**Summary**

Student evaluations of teaching (SETs) are commonly used throughout higher education as a means of evaluating instruction and teaching performance. Less common, however, is the use of mid-semester feedback (MSFs), which allows for “improvement of the teaching and learning process.” One form of midterm evaluation is known as Small Group Instructional Diagnosis (SGID), which posits the student evaluation as “a systematic procedure for collecting data about the student experience in a given course,” as it is occurring.

While MSFs are not meant to replace SETs, as the latter have considerable value, they offer advantages that end of semester evaluations do not because they collect data on teaching and learning at a point in time at which it can be used to improve the course in question before it has ended. It therefore also allows for the improvement of the learning experience for the students who offer the feedback. The development of MSFs, and in particular the process involved in SGIDs, also mitigates some of the other limitations of end of semester evaluations: the inflexibility and lack of nuance inherent to Likert-scale based evaluations; students’ potential lack of interest due to a sense of limited impact on their experience; and the common lack of institutional support in ensuring that instructors receive the necessary help to effectively use the data collected in such evaluations.

Given the promise of MSFs and the limitations of the end of semester student evaluation, the authors present three potential variations on the midterm student evaluation that can be applied in any classroom. The first of these is the original format of the MSF, or the SGID. This method of student evaluation involves a five step process in which the instructor works with a teaching consultant to collect data on student experience, analyze that data, and formulate a plan of action for improvement. The first step involves meeting with the consultant, identifying the objectives of the evaluation, and scheduling a date for the evaluation (if no consultants are available, the authors offer two alternative approaches discussed later in the article). On the day of the evaluation, which forms the second step of the process, the consultant attends the first segment of the class as an observer. Roughly thirty minutes prior to the end of the class, the instructor explains the evaluation process and its purpose, and then turns the class over to the consultant. Once the instructor has left, the consultant divides the class members up into groups of four to six students and gives them a handout with three questions. The questions proposed by the authors included: what is helping you learn in the course; what is hindering your learning; and, what suggestions do you have for improving the course. The groups are given ten minutes to discuss the questions and to come to some consensus answers, which they then write on the handout. After the ten minutes have elapsed, the facilitator collects data and writes responses to the questions on the board or any available device as each group reports out. In the fourth step of the process, the consultant processes the data collected in the evaluation session by aggregating it into
common themes. In doing so, the consultant must exercise care to ensure accuracy and to deal fairly with “singular comments and suggestions.” Following this, the consultant and the instructor meet to discuss the data collected and, potentially, to record the instructor’s reactions to the feedback. The consultant and instructor then complete this step of the process by discussing potential actions to be taken based on the students’ feedback. The final step, which is crucial, involves the instructor responding to the students’ feedback by discussing with them both the adjustments that he or she intends to make, whether during the semester, for future classes, and those that will not be made, as well as the rationale behind those decisions.

After laying out the SGID process, the authors present two variations on the midterm evaluation that can be used alternatively, particularly when consultants are not available. The first of these is the Bare Bones Questionnaire (BBQ). The process involved is essentially the same as that utilized in the SGID, but the consultant’s role is played by a colleague, who likely lacks the same level of training as an instructional consultant or coach. As a result, the questions can vary and be simplified, as will be the peer observer’s collation of the feedback. In the article, the authors offered the following sample questions for a BBQ: what does the instructor do in the class that helps you learn; what hinders your learning; what are two specific suggestions to improve learning in the class. The second variation is the Do It Yourself, or DIY, evaluation. In this case, the authors recommend much the same process, but one which depends upon the use of an evaluation survey, which can be administered online or in class, and done either individually or in groups.

The article concludes with a summation of the challenges and benefits of the MSF. The primary challenge identified by the authors is the considerable investment of time and effort required by effective use of the MSF. In this sense, they caution that use of the MSF requires a full commitment to the process. In particular, they note that a failure to engage in the last step of the process, in which the instructor discusses the feedback with the students, can create real problems within the class. Additionally, they note the need to invest the requisite time to ensure an accurate and effective analysis of the data collected from students. The benefits gained from the investment of this time and effort, however, are considerable. Through the use of MSFs instructors can gain otherwise unavailable insight into the student experience. Moreover, they gain information about what is and is not working in the classroom, and do so at a time and point in the course at which they can respond in a meaningful way (for the students enrolled in that class). The students also benefit from the use of MSFs, as the evaluations tend to increase engagement, enjoyment, and sense of empowerment.

Applications

The practical utility of this article should be readily apparent. The article presents several variations on MSFs and goes into great detail on the procedural structure for their effective implementation and use. My sense of the benefits of the evaluative technique discussed in the article is, perhaps, shaped my use, over the last several semesters, of midterm evaluations. These evaluations have had consistently positive impacts on my courses. The fact that they have done so despite my employment of a somewhat staid Likert-scale based survey only further validates the potential benefits of the employment of a more systematic approach to midterm evaluations. I would also add that, in admittedly limited discussions
with my colleagues, I have found that a minority of our faculty use even the most basic form of midterm student feedback evaluation. If this anecdotal evidence is indicative of the broader reality at UDC, then it would seem that the broad-scale implementation of rigorously structured MSFs, with or without the use of consultants, could play an important role in improving teaching and learning across the university system.

**Citations of Interest**


