

Getting Early Feedback on Courses

Why get early feedback?

Learning from your students what is working well and what could be improved before the semester ends means that you can make changes. Unlike end of semester course evaluations, there is no formal School-led process for collection or analysis of data. Getting feedback is simply an action instructional teams can take that helps them course correct (pun intended).

Furthermore, when instructors share what they learned from early feedback and what changes they are going to make because of it, students tend to feel that they are listened to and that their perspectives matter. It fosters good will.

What should I ask?

Instructional teams can choose to solicit feedback in whatever way makes sense for their courses. For example, small courses might benefit from the richness of more open-ended comments whereas for large courses, a combination of rating scales and open-ended comments might make it easier to interpret patterns. There might be a particular area of interest that an instructor has – like how class discussions or breakout rooms are going – and in addition to overarching questions, having some specific questions can facilitate targeted actions for improving the class experience. See the end of this document for a bank of questions to consider.

Models for early and mid-semester feedback

Simple, open-ended <i>Reveals overall themes. A model like this, with slight wording changes, could even be used for every class session</i>	Combo of ratings and open-ended <i>Might be more useful for larger courses so can sort average ratings more easily to understand trends</i>	Combo of ratings and open-ended with targeted specific questions <i>Helpful if seeking both general and targeted feedback</i>
<p>For example:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What's going well in the course? 2. What's not going well? 	<p>For example:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Please rate the overall quality and usefulness of the course content. (rating scale) 2. Please rate the overall quality and effectiveness of teaching in the course. (rating scale) 3. Please provide an overall course rating. (rating scale) 4. What's going well in the course? 5. What suggestions do you have for improving this course? 	<p>For example:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Please provide an overall course rating. (rating scale) 2. What's going well in the course? 3. What's not going well? 4. On average, how many hours per week are you spending on the course, including live class time and other course work? 5. Do you feel as if you've had the opportunity to build relationships with your classmates? (rating scale) 6. Approximately how many office hours did you attend? (range)

What is the process for getting early feedback on courses?

As of the Fall 2023 semester, a simple mid-semester feedback option form is available to all teaching instructors in the Blue Explorance system (the same system for course evaluations).

You can also use other anonymous surveys. Some instructors use paper surveys but a survey tool has the advantage of making it easy to compile and look at response data. If you don't use the existing survey in Blue, we recommend using [Qualtrics](#), a survey tool that is available within Harvard. There are simple online tutorials that can help you create your own qualtrics surveys. A link to a Qualtrics survey can be posted in your Canvas course site or sent out as an announcement and it is truly anonymous. Canvas also has a survey option, but the responses are not truly anonymous.

Sample invitation language

Dear Students,

It's hard to believe that we're [**X weeks**] through the term already! We've really enjoyed engaging with you in this course.

We would like to solicit your feedback on how the course is going so far. The purpose of the anonymous survey is to provide feedback concerning your learning experiences in this course. Your candid and thoughtful responses will help us improve the course and adjust if necessary. Therefore, if you would fill out this anonymous survey by [**deadline**], we'd very much appreciate it. The survey is brief and should take no more than [**3/5/10 minutes**] to complete.

Best,

[**Course instructor(s) and/or TFs**]

What should I do with the feedback?

You should read the feedback responses, pick out the themes, and **communicate back to your students** what you learned and what you are going to do differently (if anything). You want to provide a rationale for next steps because that communicates that you value your students' input and time, and not acknowledging can make the exercise feel hollow. Even if you provide the rationale for not making any changes – for example because the very thing that some students suggest should be done differently is highly regarded by other students or because the suggested changes are outside of your control – you are closing the loop.

It can also be helpful to compare early feedback with end of semester evaluations and some instructors find it helpful to jot down ideas so they aren't forgotten by the time they teach the class again. If you would like a confidential set of additional eyes to help interpret feedback – either from a peer or someone in the office of education – feel free to reach out to Sejal Vashi (vashi@hsph.harvard.edu) who will arrange for a referral.

Bank of questions that are often used in early, mid-semester, and end of semester surveys

Common questions

1. What's going well in the course thus far? For instance, what about the class structure or activities is helping you learn?
2. What's not going well thus far? Is there anything about the class structure or activities that is making it difficult for you to learn?

3. What suggestions do you have for improving this course?
4. Is there anything else that you'd like the teaching staff to know about your experience in the course?
5. On average, how many hours per week are you spending on the course, including live class time and other course work? [0-5, 5-10, 10-15]
6. What course concepts, if any, have you struggled with?
7. Has the course offered sufficient opportunities for you to engage with fellow students? If not, please suggest ways in which the teaching staff could help facilitate these interactions.

Sample targeted questions

Satisfaction with instruction and pacing

- How satisfied are you with your instructor's teaching? [very satisfied, satisfied, neutral, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied]. Please explain _____
- How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your interaction with instructor(s)? [very satisfied, satisfied, neutral, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied]
- How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the availability of your teaching staff? [very satisfied, satisfied, neutral, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied]
- Please rate the pace of this course. [much too fast, too fast, just right, too slow, much too slow]
- How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the level of rigor? [very satisfied, satisfied, neutral, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied]

Course content and difficulty

- How satisfied are you with course content? [very satisfied, satisfied, neutral, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied]. Please explain _____
- Please rate the difficulty of this course. [very difficult, difficult, moderate, easy, very easy]
- On average, how many hours per week did you spend on the following aspects of the course: [in the bank of course elements, could include things like "online videos," "video quizzes," "readings," "homework assignments," "discussion," "office hours"] [<1 hour, 1-2 hours, 3-4 hours, 5-6 hours, 7+ hours]

Community and synchronous/asynchronous

- Do you feel as if you've had the opportunity to build relationships with your classmates? [scale 1-10]
- Which lessons/weeks did you attend as a "live" session? Which did you view later? [Week 1: topic....Week X: topic] [Attended live, viewed recording only, attended live and viewed recording, did not attend live or view recording].
- If you viewed any recordings after class, please describe why you chose to do so.

Accessibility

- Is there anything that is limiting your ability to participate in online learning activities? Yes/No. If yes, please explain.
- If you reside in a time zone outside of the Eastern Time Zone (ET), do you feel that your needs have been adequately accommodated to ensure access to learning? [Yes/No. If yes, please elaborate]

Office hours

- Every week, there are 1-2 optional office hours offered. Approximately how many office hours did you attend? [0, 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7].
- If you did not attend any office hours, why not? Select all that apply. [did not have enough time, did not find them useful, not offered at times that I was able to attend, I did not feel that I needed the extra assistance, other: please explain ____]

Technology

- How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your instructor(s)' use of technology [very satisfied, satisfied, neutral, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied]
- Which of the following features do you think has complemented the learning process during live sessions? Select all that apply.
 - Zoom breakout rooms
 - Zoom polling

- Poll Everywhere
 - Zoom whiteboard
 - Zoom annotate
 - Other: _____
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- Which of the following technologies do you think has complemented the learning process outside of live sessions? Select all that apply.
 - Canvas discussion boards
 - Prerecorded lectures
 - Submitting assignments via Canvas
 - Canvas groups
 - Other: _____