

## Center for Instructional Development and Research

100 Gerberding Hall  
Box 351265  
University of Washington  
Seattle, WA 98195-1265  
Phone: 206.543.6588  
Fax: 206.685.1213  
Email: cidr@u.washington.edu

<http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb>

Information for People who Teach  
at the University of Washington

## Learning from Student Feedback

Instructors are always getting feedback from students – through the questions students ask, the looks on students' faces, and the coursework students do – but it can be difficult to interpret these indirect forms of feedback or to use them as a basis for decisions about teaching. Systematically collecting feedback during a course can help you see the course as students see it and help you identify ways to support student learning more effectively.

### WHY GATHER STUDENT FEEDBACK DURING THE COURSE?

Collecting feedback during the course provides information that can be useful right away, while you are still working with students that quarter. You can use this information to:

- Identify features of the course that students find helpful, as well as students' perceptions of obstacles to learning.
- Give you a more informed basis for making decisions while you are still teaching the course.
- Open lines of communication with students who might not otherwise volunteer their comments.

### COLLECTING STUDENT FEEDBACK

Many UW instructors have found it helpful to have a CIDR consultant visit class and interview students at midterm. CIDR consultants then work with instructors to interpret the feedback data and determine appropriate ways to respond. For more information, see:

<http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/consulting/SGID.html>

Instructors can also collect their own feedback by asking students for brief written comments or by using online surveys. For more information and examples, see:

<http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/consulting/studentfeedback.html>

[http://catalyst.washington.edu/help/teaching\\_guides/evaluation.html](http://catalyst.washington.edu/help/teaching_guides/evaluation.html)

### INTERPRETING STUDENT FEEDBACK

- **Be open.** Though there are many ways to examine the effects of your teaching, student feedback offers a unique perspective. Start by asking yourself, "What can I learn by finding out how students experience my teaching?"
- **Identify patterns and underlying themes.** Individual student comments that stand out from the rest still need to be considered, but they should be understood in the context of these common themes.
- **Recognize diversity of student perceptions.** Student responses may be inconsistent or even conflicting. For example, some may report that they benefit from group discussions, but others

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say discussions are unhelpful. Knowing this range of student perceptions can help you see how students are experiencing the class differently and give you insight into students' diverse learning needs.

- **Consider other data.** Record your own reflections, ask a colleague for his or her perspective, or work with a CIDR consultant to help you make sense of the feedback in light of what is known about effective teaching and learning.

## RESPONDING TO STUDENT FEEDBACK

It is important to acknowledge and respond to students' feedback, but responding does not mean simply fulfilling student requests. Rather, being responsive means considering student input and finding ways to help align student expectations with your teaching and course goals.

For example, you might choose to make a change recommended by students, but you might also address student perceptions by helping them see the value or purpose of something that they identified as unhelpful.

In your response,

- Note students' positive feedback, and let them know you will continue to do what is working well.
- Identify specific changes you intend to make in response to students' feedback.
- Acknowledge student feedback that you are not planning to incorporate into your teaching, and explain why.

Your response to the feedback can also create opportunities to clarify your expectations for the class, and open doors for further dialogue with students about their learning.

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## HOW CAN CIDR HELP?

To talk with a CIDR consultant about collecting, interpreting, or responding to student feedback, call 206-543-6588, or send a message to [info@cidr.washington.edu](mailto:info@cidr.washington.edu)



## Center for Instructional Development and Research

CIDR promotes excellence in teaching and learning at the University of Washington through its work with individual faculty and TAs, departments, campus-wide initiatives, and University leaders. CIDR staff are available year-round to collaborate on the design, implementation, and assessment of ways to advance teaching and learning for all students in the diverse UW community. Consultations are confidential and offered at no charge to UW faculty, TAs, and departments.

If you have questions about teaching and learning, or you would like to find out more about working with CIDR, you can call us at 543-6588, send a message to [cidr@u.washington.edu](mailto:cidr@u.washington.edu), or visit our web site:

<http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/>



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This issue of the Bulletin was developed by CIDR Instructional Consultants Alka Arora, Ambre Martinez, and Nancy Emery.