

What Difference Do We Make in the Long Run?

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We regularly ask recent clients for feedback on the value and impact of consulting with CIDR, but in the past we have not systematically assessed our longer-term contributions to the teaching of our clients. This session describes efforts to begin identifying CIDR's lasting effects on the teaching of faculty and TAs who consulted at CIDR 1-5 years ago. We will present our survey methods and provide a summary of responses from former clients. Participants will discuss implications for our work as consultants and identify further strategies for assessing the value and impact of teaching centers.

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² CIDR's Quarterly Evaluation is administered online at <http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/CIDRfeedback.html>. CIDR's most recent annual report, including a summary of client feedback and an overview of CIDR activities, is available online at: <http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/about/CIDRActivities.html>

Long-Term Client Feedback – Characteristics of Respondents

Response Rates

Year	# sent out	# responses	% of total	% per year
2001/02	123	26	15 %	21 %
2002/03	167	31	18 %	19 %
2003/04	159	29	17 %	18 %
2004/05	167	36	21 %	22 %
2005/06	168	48	28 %	29 %
<i>Total</i>	<i>784</i>	<i>170</i>	<i>22 %</i>	

Use of CIDR Services

Approximately how often have you consulted or worked with someone at CIDR?

- 101 1-3 times
- 36 4-6 times
- 33 7 or more times

Current Position

- 3 Department Chair
- 14 Professor
- 13 Associate Professor
- 45 Assistant Professor
- 5 Senior Lecturer
- 19 Lecturer
- 3 Lead TA
- 36 TA or Graduate Student
- 6 Professional Staff
- 5 Post-doc
- 20 Other
- 1 Not Specified

Discipline

- 23 Engineering
- 16 Health Sciences
- 13 Humanities
- 50 Sciences
- 33 Social Sciences
- 24 Other Professional Schools
- 11 Not Specified

Current Institution

- 112 University of Washington
- 46 Higher Education or Research Institution other than UW
- 13 Not Currently at a Higher Education or Research Institution
- 1 Not Specified

Preliminary Findings

Ratings Questions

	mean	median	mode
2a. To what extent has your teaching (or how you think about teaching) been affected as a result of your work with CIDR?	3.8	4	4
3a. Overall, how valuable has your work with CIDR been?	4.1	4	5
6a. If a colleague asked for your help or advice about teaching, how likely would you be to mention any of the services offered by CIDR?	4.5	5	5

Open-Ended Questions

2b. Please give one or more examples of ways that your teaching (or how you think about teaching) has been affected as a result of your work with CIDR:

change in perspective

- Considering the student voice has been something that began with this work with CIDR and is something I have continued in my tenure-track position at another university.
- I benefited from the sense that I was not teaching “in isolation” and that I was part of a larger community that cared about what was going on in the classroom.
- Without CIDR's help, I would never have thought that I was a good TA, and yet once I could see that my “lens” was systematically biased negative, I was able to make the mental correction, which freed me up not only to enjoy my own work, but to recognize (at least mentally) that my teaching was actually very good ... Without the nurturing, supportive, and objective work with CIDR's remarkable staff, I would probably have decided that I was not a good instructor and turned away to other things.

change in practices

- They helped tremendously when I needed to convert my small-class teaching style to serve the needs of a large lecture class. They assisted with assignment design, syllabus design, articulation of learning goals, and test design. They also helped me with ideas for making a large lecture (100+) class interactive with opportunities for active student participation.
- Through my consultation with CIDR I have put more of an emphasis on keeping students apprised of the big picture and how individual lectures and homework assignments support the learning objectives of the course.
- I had a terrible experience in a senior seminar in which a student “shutdown” the conversation and I couldn't revive it. I contacted CIDR for advice. I now begin every seminar course with a reading and group discussion about “how to seminar”. We set up rules for the seminar collectively. It has made a huge impact on the quantity and quality of the conversations. The best thing I ever changed!

working constructively with student feedback

- Meeting with CIDR consultants has helped me learn how to react effectively to written student feedback (i.e., how to address student during the class after the written feedback, how to weight comments made by students, etc.)
- I had trouble imagining how to obtain substantial, open-ended feedback from a large class and then make meaningful sense out of the volume of information. Now, I regularly get this kind of feedback and cluster/code it similarly to the way I saw in my CIDR consultations.

- It has helped me understand and use the student ratings in a constructive way, by modifying course content in response to both the midterm interview and final ratings.

4. What were the primary benefits you received from working with CIDR?

CIDR staff expertise

- Their expertise in student learning helps me to view my courses differently.
- Having CIDR experts share the depth of their expertise and their knowledge of what other instructors and programs have done successfully in the past. The CIDR consultants listen to individual instructors needs and adapt solutions accordingly, i.e. we don't simply get a "one-size-fits-all" solution.
- Taking the time to reflect on the structure and goals of a course with the support of experts
- It's very useful to have people to bounce ideas around with, especially since I am in a not-necessarily-teaching-friendly department. It's also good to have someone to be able to interpret either my ideas or the students' feedback into something concrete that both sides can understand.

change in perspective

- The one-to-one post-observation interview with a CIDR representative was a wonderful moment to talk "teaching" with an individual committed to helping those of us with little or no formal classroom training learn to communicate better to and with our students. It made me realize that - regardless of what research and writing I do - my time in front of a class is a large part of my academic experience and, in order to fully enjoy that time, I can focus on the joy of sharing ideas with my students.
- My teaching improved and I began to enjoy it more.
- It was great to talk with someone who'd visited lots of different classes and seen how they worked or didn't work. It made me feel less alone in some of the problems I was having, and also helped me work to improve my teaching.
- My interactions with CIDR have helped me be more alert to student feedback in the classroom. Are they getting it? Does the assignment make sense to them? Does the assignment help them learn what I want them to learn? I also felt personally supported by the staff at CIDR. They seemed to have great confidence that I could be a good teacher ... so I believed them!

change in practices

- I create clearer more achievable objectives, I teach more precisely to those objectives. I vary my activities to a greater degree with students, better reaching students with a range of learning styles. I solicit feedback in a variety of ways.
- New ideas for lectures, resources to improve style and efficiency for teaching, seeing teaching not as a burden that takes away from research
- CIDR staff was very attentive and knowledgeable. Since they had worked with people in my field before, they knew what common problems were and they could tell me what had worked and what had not. More importantly, they were able to tell me what people in other fields were doing in their classes and how their experiences could help me.

5. What recommendations can you offer for helping CIDR be more effective?

none (88)

keep up the good work (33)

services (33)

- I found conversations most useful when they were very concrete.
- More solid examples of teaching strategies with data/information on why work, in what situations, etc.
- Spend more time on the “assessment” piece by taking a little more time to help the professor determine what he/she wants from CIDR. All too often, we just come because we know we need help, but we're not always good at identifying what exactly we need help with.

more visibility, accessibility, outreach (31)

- Do you have a systematic training class for practical teaching and interaction with students?
- Do you contact all new faculty as they arrive to inform them about your services? More ambitiously, do you have support (or can you get it) to offer a general teaching workshop to all new faculty?
- Have one evening each month when there is an open forum with a CIDR person available to talk one-on-one or to the group, and have another evening each month with appointments available.

more work through departments (14)

- I think departments should have to actively promote CIDR to faculty. Most teachers can use some feedback and can stand to improve their teaching. I wonder how many know this resource is available?
- If there is some way to have college or departmental representatives work with you to keep a sustained effort on teaching improvement, it would help.
- More visibility at the department / program levels. I would like chairs and curriculum committees in various departments to know more about what CIDR can do for entire unit.

6b. What opportunities do you see for ways that CIDR might be able to assist other instructors or your department in thinking about teaching and learning?

none (101)

services (35)

- There is serious interest in cooperative or participative learning strategies. In fact, I have now been teaching a course ... by this method. Curiously, this course always receives lower rating than my other courses. I am beginning to believe that this is partly due to the fact that the standard evaluation forms are not asking the right questions. Is there any chance that an appropriate evaluation form tailored to such teaching methods can be developed by CIDR ?
- I would suggest they become advocates for students and somehow get information about their services to department heads and student list servs so that students graduating and entering the job market know what ... a teaching portfolio is and how to put together a job talk since apparently some department faculty do not see the importance in mentioning that such things are needed in order to apply for academic positions.
- The only thing that I recommend is for CIDR to provide opportunities that are not perceived as too time and energy consuming. A mixture of the things that are already being done, along with smaller projects that may be more accessible to research faculty.

more visibility, accessibility, outreach (31)

- Remind faculty and doctoral students of your services at the beginning and mid-point of each quarter.

- I would go to CIDR more but for not having enough time. It's always, always a matter of time.
- I think just being more present. I don't think that faculty always know just how much benefit can come from talking to people at CIDR. A little bit of time spent with a consultant saves enormous time/energy/sometimes misery(!) later. Maybe sell yourselves more (yucky process, but the product you have is SO good!).

more work through departments (21)

- The only suggestion that comes to mind is more workshops scheduled within departments.
- Get invited to faculty meetings so you can let faculty members know what you do.
- Consider integrating CIDR work with departmental peer-evaluation processes already in place so it doesn't seem like an extra layer of review. That would probably have to be a change that would come from the departments, though.

keep up the good work (15)

- I think CIDR should continue their work as it is. You guys are doing a fantastic job.
- I think a lot of the initiative to seek help has to come from the faculty themselves. CIDR offers plenty of support, if it is sought out.
- I have trouble thinking of how you could do more, since your activities are so numerous and varied.

Final Question: What questions or challenges do you currently have regarding teaching?

none (82)

focus on course content issues (41)

- Continuing to keep my teaching style relevant and staying in touch with what is important to students
- I think I would like to know more about ideas to maximize interaction but still allow for content to be covered fully. Thanks CIDR! You are great!

focus on instructor issues (30)

- Despite my years of experience, each course still requires 150%. It's overwhelming - especially when it's a big course (>100 students). I want to maintain the investment, the impact, the quality, but I am really afraid of burnout
- Time! ... how to do a good job at teaching w/o letting it consume your life? I have learned some time saving tips from CIDR over the years, but am still getting used to putting these in practice.

focus on context issues (28)

- I will continue to try to develop engaging courses within the confines of the department - which often focuses on the type of survey course that can be a little dry from the student perspective.
- Good teaching means nothing to this administration and the ... chair. Extended efforts are great for students, but counter-productive to promotion.

focus on student issues (24)

- Managing large numbers of students, some of whom are only marginally studious & responsible
- incorporating different levels of student background into the way a course is taught so that all students will benefit

focus on career issues (22)

- Trying to keep up with the class and do a good job, while getting everything else done before coming up for tenure!
- Finding a job beyond my post-doc. Got one?

Comments by respondents who gave relatively lower ratings

no comments indicating dissatisfaction with CIDR (10)

limited contact with CIDR (10)

- I am no longer at the UW, but I have often returned to CIDR to demonstrate what a teaching/learning center might look like at my university
- I think you all are very good and responsive, even though I haven't used your services much, it is great knowing you are there. I have only taught one course. If I taught more, I know I'd have used your services more. I have recommended you to other people and spoken highly of you.
- In my limited experience, the service was very helpful.

not achieving desired outcomes (4)

- It was my first time teaching, I was very nervous and wanted someone to validate that I was doing the right thing. That's what I got from you guys. But the things suggested were more than I was willing to do as an adjunct.
- CIDR was extremely helpful multiple times in helping me to redesign courses, get feedback from students, and work on improving my teaching. Unfortunately, my issues seemed to be quite intractable. No one could figure out why my student evaluations were relatively low – not colleagues, TAs, or CIDR staff. This is probably a fairly unusual situation.
- In many cases, my [student] evaluation scores are the lowest in the department. However, I have done "everything" I can think of to determine why this is and figure out how to change it, I cannot seem to have an impact on my evaluation scores.
- After working with CIDR, my evaluations became worse and they are only now beginning to recover. Many of the suggestions really did not work. My students hate reflections and the learning oriented projects that were proposed. The overall effect has been a loss of confidence in my ability to teach. But the people at CIDR were wonderful to work with and very encouraging.

perceived as out of touch with client situation, needs (3)

- Be more in touch with the sensitivity of new TAs - there are discipline differences, and sometimes TAs can view CIDR advisers as preachy or basing wide judgments about TAs based on limited evidence.
- I think the person who observed my class missed a lot because she wasn't in my field and therefore couldn't understand the content. I think to really look deeply at the effectiveness of someone's teaching, you've got to be able to understand the content.
- CIDR's "one size fits all" approach does not take into account the different needs of students in different majors or the different abilities of students in different majors. CIDR also suffers from this overly liberal assumption that students are always right and the best instructors cater to their whims. Students are almost always going to favor less work and higher grades -- when instructors are punished for inflicting standards, in a school with rampant grade inflation and plummeting standards, you know that the system is broken.

Lessons Learned

Survey Methods

For our first attempt, it was valuable to survey broadly, but in the future we may learn more by surveying

- Selected groups of clients, addressing more specific questions - for example, clients with tenure, SGID clients, PFF participants ...
- Clients who were previously invited to give short-term feedback
- On a more regular basis - for example, conducting a regular “two-years-later” survey

CIDR Services

What should we be doing differently?

- Clients value us most when they see that we’re listening and we’re specifically addressing their concerns; they value us least when we’re seen as “one size fits all” or not appreciating disciplinary distinctions.
- Clients are glad they found us, but they think it should be easier for others to find us: More visibility, outreach, and advertising.
- Clients see departments as a key to improving teaching: Policies, rewards, and resources that come through departments are the ones expected to have the greatest effect.
- When we consider the things that previous clients tell us they valued most about CIDR, what does that suggest about how we represent ourselves to others?
 - Unique expertise of CIDR staff
 - Change in perspective regarding learning, teaching, or students
 - Community of colleagues who share interest in teaching
 - Change in teaching practices

Further Assessment

Long-term feedback on other CIDR activities: services for departments, materials, programs and events

Questions for further study:

- What initially motivates faculty and TAs to seek out CIDR?
- Effects of specific services – for example,
 - How are clients’ beliefs and practices affected by collecting student feedback? By maintaining a teaching portfolio? ...
 - What is it about our consultations on diversity and on using writing that cause clients to value them so highly?
- Impact of current CIDR collaborations with departments – for example,
 - Awareness and perceptions of CIDR in the department
 - Teaching practices, climate for teaching in the department