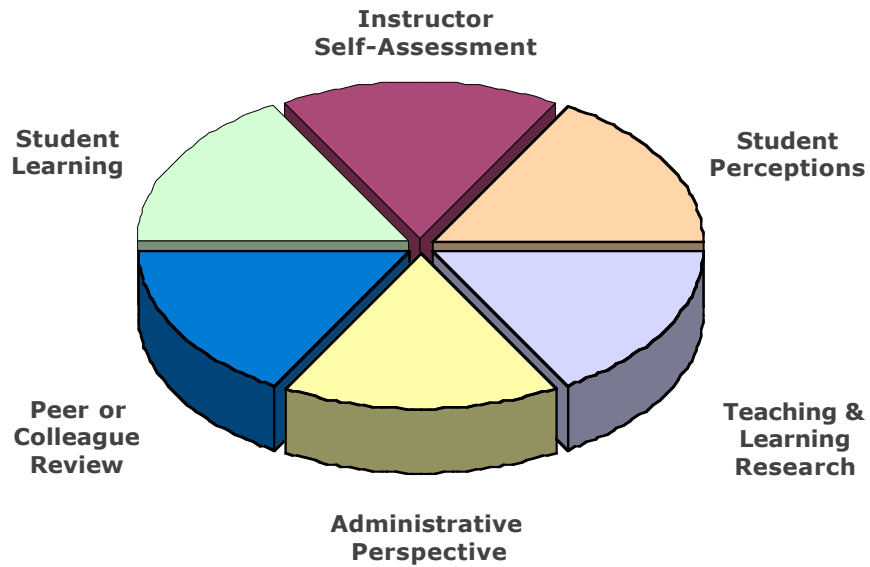


Sources of Data for the Assessment of Teaching

A complex activity like teaching is understood best when it is viewed from more than one perspective. At CIDR our goal is to help you gather information from multiple sources: Each source offers valuable information, but none by itself gives the whole picture.

On this page, note different steps you might be able to take in order to make use of data from each of these different sources.



Gathering and Using Student Feedback to Improve your Teaching

1) Student ratings

What are student ratings?

Student evaluations of teaching effectiveness are administered by UW's Office of Educational Assessment (OEA) at the end of the quarter. When evaluating courses, students fill out two forms: a computer-scored "bubble sheet" form and a yellow, open-ended comment form ("yellow sheet").

What role do instructors play in collecting student ratings?

Your department may order the forms for you, or doing so may be your responsibility. (TAs can sometimes choose from a selection of different computer-scored forms, depending on the individual course and instructional goals.) Regardless of which bubble-sheet form you choose, you can add extra questions to the back of the standard form.

You are responsible for facilitating the collection process with students. Tell students you take their feedback seriously, and allow 15 to 20 minutes – rushed students are more likely to be harsh or cryptic in their comments.

Early the following quarter, after you have submitted student grades, you will receive 1) a report summarizing the student responses on the computer-scored forms and 2) original copies of the open-ended forms.

How can instructors use student ratings to improve their teaching?

Many instructors have questions about how to make constructive use of their end-of-quarter student ratings. Student comments can be informative, but they can also be puzzling or troubling, and instructors sometimes find it hard to respond. For more information, see CIDR's web tutorial, *Understanding and Using Your Student Ratings*: <http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/ratings/index.html>

CIDR offers individual consultations as well as departmental workshops on interpreting and developing meaningful ways to make use of end-of-quarter student evaluations: *Discuss Your Student Ratings*, <http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/consulting/analysis.html>

2) Midterm student feedback

What is midterm student feedback?

Many instructors choose to collect feedback from students while the quarter is underway, often around the midpoint of the term. Doing so often entails asking questions that require students to reflect on the course as a whole. For example, students may be asked to list the aspects of the course that are helping them learn and to suggest possible changes that might help them to learn more. Instructors use this kind of feedback to inform their decisions about what to address in subsequent class sessions, to see how students are experiencing the course, and to identify issues that require clarification.

What role do instructors play in collecting midterm student feedback?

Collecting midterm student feedback is usually initiated by the instructor, who decides whether, when, and how to collect midterm student feedback, and how to respond to it. Ideally, midterm feedback is collected anonymously from students. CIDR consultants are available to consult and/or help with any aspect of the process, including:

- Deciding what questions to ask
- Deciding whether to collect midterm feedback in class or online

- Whether to collect written feedback only, or to do a more in-depth midterm class interview: The Midterm Class Interview, sometimes referred to as the SGID (Small Group Instructional Diagnosis), is an open-ended, mid-course oral interview process in which students discuss their perceptions of the effectiveness of a course, including both its strengths and potential areas for change. CIDR staff can facilitate the SGID process for individual instructors at their request. For more information, see <http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/consulting/sgid.html>

How can instructors use midterm student feedback to improve their teaching?

After collecting midterm student feedback, instructors must decide how to respond. You may wish to discuss possible responses with another instructor in your department and/or with a CIDR consultant, who can help you identify important themes in the students' feedback. After reviewing the feedback and discussing its implications together, you and the consultant can discuss options for responding to it.

3) Classroom Assessment of student mastery of course content

What is classroom assessment?

There are many different ways of assessing student mastery of course content even before exams and assignments are due (by which point, after all, it's too late for you to do anything about it!) These assessment methods are ungraded, instructor-initiated, take place in class, and are integrated into the presentation of course content. Feedback collected once is helpful, but regular feedback collected on an ongoing basis tells you far more.

Example classroom assessment techniques:

Minute Paper

Give students two minutes to answer two questions: (1) "What was the most important thing you learned ___?" (instructor fills in the blank: during today's class, while doing the homework, while reading the assignment, etc.), and (2) "What's one important question you still need to answer?" Students hand in their answers before they leave class. Use this information to find out if students are understanding the material in the same way that you intend them to. If they're not, this information will help you make changes in what you present or how you present it.

Focused Lists

Identify a key point or concept that you expect students to know, and ask them to make a list of word and ideas associated with it. Give them a time limit (3-5 minutes) or an item limit (5-10 items), and collect their lists when they are done. Use this information to help you understand how well students know and use the common vocabulary of the subject you are studying, to see what concepts they associate with one another, or to check their preconceptions before you introduce a topic in detail.

Defining Features Matrix

Ask students to distinguish concepts in terms of a single set of features. List the features on the side of the page, and the concepts across the top; ask the students to indicate (+) or (-) under each concept to show the presence or absence of each feature. Use this information to help you determine students' grasp of apparently similar concepts that may be easily confused with one another, or of apparently unrelated concepts which may share important characteristics.

For more information on these and other classroom assessment techniques, see:

<http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/resources/catools.html>

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

Making Use of Student Feedback

Purposes and Benefits	Potential Pitfalls	Avoiding the Pitfalls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide you with another source of data to help you make better decisions about your teaching. • Discover student perspectives on the course so you can make adjustments, clarify policies, or address misunderstandings, <i>before</i> the course is over. • Get more systematic data (i.e., more systematic than reading the looks on people's faces) to confirm your impressions of how the course is going. • Get a better sense of how your students are experiencing the class, and what your students are/aren't learning. • Get a better sense of the class <i>as a whole</i>, not only those who raise their hands, ask questions after class, come to office hours, etc. • Identify particular ways that a course is going well – what you have done that students appreciate, and what you want to incorporate into future courses. • Explore aspects of a course that don't seem to be going as you had hoped or expected, and get ideas for how to make things more effective (for both present and future courses). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misuse of data – overlooking important lessons that can be learned, or overgeneralizing from a single case. • Because students don't fully appreciate how classes or organized, or the roles of professors and TAs, they may suggest changing things that you have no control over. • Because students don't have your perspective on the subject matter or what they need to learn, they may suggest changing things that you think should not be changed. • If you raise expectations that you are interested in hearing students' feedback, and then you don't respond to it, it will be worse than if you had never asked in the first place. • What if students interpret your request for feedback as a way of admitting that you don't know what to do, so you're asking them for advice? • What if feedback reveals diversity of student opinion, so that responding to the concerns of any one group increases dissatisfaction among others? • What if students use the opportunity to vent frustration or say something hurtful? • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider data from multiple sources, in addition to student feedback, to make decisions about your teaching. • Ask specific questions relevant to aspects of course that you <i>can</i> change. • Tell students what kinds of feedback would be useful on open-ended questions – for example, that you want comments on section/lab, not lecture. • You don't have to make every change suggested! Often feedback suggests ways you can clarify existing practices. CIDR staff are available to help you brainstorm ways of responding to feedback. • Give students enough time to answer and tell them you take their feedback seriously. • Focus on the themes or patterns in the feedback, not single or hurtful comments (you may want to work with a CIDR consultant who can summarize the themes for you). • Ask for feedback periodically, so that students don't see a single request for feedback as their only opportunity to express everything they might want to say.

Going Back to the Classroom:

How you talk to your students about their feedback can make a difference in how they perceive your response to it. We've found the most important things you can do when you reenter the classroom are to 1) thank the students for participating and let them know that you've heard and considered their feedback, 2) explain what changes you will and will not be making, and 3) explain the reasons why you've made those decisions. *It's not necessary to address every single concern the students raise*; in fact, it's more effective to single out the two or three most important points and focus your comments on those.