

College Student Feedback Can Provide Valuable Teaching Guidance

 www.huffingtonpost.com/s-l-young/college-student-feedback-_b_9959812.html

Another semester is over, and it's always a bitter sweet moment! Nevertheless, I'm glad that my students' - at least most of them - successfully completed my courses. However, I'm also sad that another group is gone; it's a kind of a proud parent moment --- no matter the age of my students.

Usually for a few days after a semester ends, I reflect on the things that went well and anything that could be improved. It's in this critical examination of the latter that my teaching and classroom learning environment evolves toward reflections of organizational growth and team-based results. My progression as an educator is driven by continuous feedback from multiple sources. Throughout the semester, students are encouraged to provide me with honest and candid feedback, which can be used to make my teaching along with my courses better.

Feedback is obtained in different ways:

- Verbal (Informal) - Students are encouraged to periodically discuss the course with me by providing insights about anything that's liked as well as identifying opportunities for improvements;
- Written (Informal) - Students are asked to provide written input about various elements of the course.
- *Early in the semester*, comments are obtained to gauge student engagement, receive comments about the types/number of homework assignments, evaluate the quality of course materials, and provide comments about my teaching methodology.
- *Near the end-of-the-semester*, comments are obtained to request information about the things liked/not liked about the course and anything that should be added/dropped;
- Written (Formal) - Around the end of the semester, students are asked to provide administration with their course evaluation (e.g., the course itself, materials, my teaching, other intangibles) --- usually as part of the performance review process.

The benefit of this ongoing feedback is to get students involved in providing critical assessments similar to the way it's done in business environments. Moreover, this engagement helps students to become active partners in the creation of a collaborative and dynamic learning environment. Based on these different evaluations, considerations are made by me about whether adjustments should be made during and/or after the semester.

It was always interesting to me that college course evaluations are completed at the end-of-the-semester. This input can be useful; however, there are a few issues with this approach: 1) the information received doesn't benefit nor are actions plans implemented to make adjustments for the current students. 2) the information received might not apply or isn't applicable to future students, and 3) the input at the end-of-the-term can be retaliatory due to a student not doing well or other reasons.

During my academic career, I never had an instructor ask students about the quality of their teaching, materials, course structure, or anything else on an ongoing basis. Remembering my past challenges connecting with many professors, I tell my students on the first day of class that I'm providing a service that they're paying to receive -- similar to any other business. Therefore, if I don't deliver a quality service or teach in a manner in which my students are effectively learning, then I need to do something different to meet my customers' expectations or needs.

It's extremely rare that a teaching style will be acceptable or preferable for a group of diverse students.

Notwithstanding, there are ways that faculty and students can collectively work to ensure that the learning environment is a mutually beneficial experience. Students shouldn't feel limited in their ability to request or sometimes demand better teaching services. If this was a traditional business-to-customer model, then students would be more comfortable requesting or sometimes demanding adjustments. Therefore, these principals shouldn't be applied differently for the services delivered in a classroom either.

This post originally appeared on S. L. Young's blog on his website at: www.slyoung.com

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