Mid-Term Class Interviews

As instructors think about their teaching and student learning, they have questions about the effectiveness of the teaching/learning process, the effects of instructor decisions on student learning, and the student-instructor relationship. For instance, does the course organization foster student learning? What material do students see as relevant or irrelevant? Are the writing assignments achieving desired goals? Is the pace of the course too fast or too slow? Are students comfortable asking for help? In an effort to answer such questions, instructors seek systematic ways to obtain student feedback.

The Mid-Term Class Interview is a process designed to help instructors answer such questions. Class interviews with students provide suggestions to strengthen the course, increase communication between students and instructor, and generally improve teaching and learning. The process identifies not only areas for change, but also ways to address those areas. We recommend using this procedure in the middle of the term, after students have received at least one grade. We suggest avoiding days immediately before an exam and days when you plan to return graded work.

The Interview Process

The process involves an experienced consultant working directly with the instructor and students in the class. First, the consultant and instructor meet to discuss the course and determine whether a class interview is the most appropriate method for the course and instructor. The consultant then meets with students during a single class session to gather the data, but without the instructor and TAs. Using about 30 minutes of class time, the consultant directs students to form small groups, select a recorder, and come to consensus on answers to two questions. Although the questions may vary in form, they always focus on strengths and areas for change, including suggestions for making changes. The most common questions asked during the process are:

1. What helps you learn in this course?
2. What changes would improve your learning?

After ten minutes of discussion, the consultant asks the groups to report to the entire class. If an instructor wants feedback on specific aspects of the course, the consultant can make sure that is addressed during the whole class discussion. The consultant collects and summarizes the groups' ideas, clarifying until the students are satisfied that the consultant understands the information being reported. The instructor and consultant then meet to discuss the data and develop teaching improvement goals that are responsive and specific to the course.

Benefits to Students and Instructors

Student and instructor response to the Mid-Term Interview process has been outstanding. Students appreciate the mid-term timing, which provides opportunity for changes to affect them, and the heightened teacher awareness of student concerns. Instructors appreciate the personal interaction and supportive interpretation by a consultant, as well as the concrete student input in a form that is easily accessible to the instructor.

Angela R. Linse, Ph.D., Executive Director
Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence, Penn State
http://www.schreyerinstitute.psu.edu/
Student Feedback Form

Number of participants in group ________

****Try to come to consensus, but if you cannot, please indicate areas of disagreement.****

I. **What helps you learn in this course? Please explain or give an example for each.**

   Things that work well in this course

   Explanation/Example (i.e. why?)

   1.

   2.

   3.

   4.

II. **What changes would improve your learning? Please suggest specific ways the changes could be made.**

   1.

   2.

   3.

   4.

III. **Individual Comments:**