How Do I Know I’m Doing Well?

Student Course Evaluations

All courses taught by sessional/term faculty members and faculty in their first years at VIU before they are “regularized” are evaluated using the student course evaluation survey. There are different question formats relevant to theory, clinical and practicum courses.

Currently, all student surveys for evaluation of VIU faculty occur through an online distribution system. Please check with your Program Assistant or Chair for details regarding timing. Typically these occur in week 9-11 of the course. If your course occurs out of the usual term sequence, advise the Program Assistant who will request the survey administration at the appropriate time.

For instructors who are teaching multiple courses (3 or more) to the same cohort of students arrangements will be made for a maximum of 2 evaluations to occur at the same time to prevent “evaluation fatigue”. Please discuss with the program assistant who will consult with the Dean.

You will receive the results of the student evaluations through an electronic link following the submission of your class grades. The Dean reviews the student results and completes a summary indicating if the student evaluations are consistent with satisfactory teaching as outlined by the standards of teaching.

If there are concerns from the student survey instructors will be asked to complete a self-evaluation describing their strengths and challenges relative to the student evaluations. A plan for improvement which identifies goals and strategies to address the student concerns should be identified. The instructor will then meet with the Dean who will complete a formative instructional evaluation summary to identify whether the results of the student survey and resultant plan for improvement meet the expectations for a satisfactory evaluation (see Standards for Teaching performance). The following term (in which an instructor who received a formative evaluation teaches) the Dean will review the previous evaluation summary as well as
the current term student surveys and the results of any additional evaluation tools recommended in the formative evaluation. The Dean will complete a summary evaluation after meeting with the instructor to review the results of the evaluation tools and will follow-up any previous recommendations. Sessional instructors (VIUFA) must have a satisfactory evaluation in order to be eligible for right of first refusal. Refer to Article 9.2.2.2 of the VIUFA Collective Agreement for the parameters of this eligibility.

**Getting Feedback**

**Student Feedback**

The most widely used feedback method is an end of course survey. These surveys are often part of formal faculty evaluations. These surveys or variations of them can be useful for an instructor to gather information from students about their own teaching and learning.

Getting feedback during the term can help improve teaching and learning in a more immediate and powerful way.

Barbara Gross Davis (1993) provided some practical ideas on getting useful information from students that can assist instructors in improving both short and long term teaching. With immediate feedback and some action, it is not too late for the students you are working with to benefit. The feedback can help with selection of teaching methods, knowing what students’ needs are, improving clarity and expectations, and possibly adjusting assignments. You need to be clear on what specific information is useful and have a variety of strategies to collect the information. Some of the possible strategies are:

- **Student feedback form with anonymous voluntary feedback** at the end of a section of the term. General questions and open response work well with this technique. For example you can ask what is going well for them and why, what suggestions they may have for course content or delivery, and/or what their needs are that need to be addressed. You are best to leave the room and have a student volunteer collect the forms and return them to a department secretary for pickup after.

  Asking such questions at midterm makes it possible for you to respond to student concerns and adjust your course before it is too late for this group of students. If you choose to ask for midterm feedback, it’s useful to report these results back to the students so they know you are paying attention. The idea for this step is to turn students into partners on course design, and to involve them in your thinking as instructor. You might think about the results in clusters of “what you said I’m pleased about” “what you suggested that I can change”; and “what you suggested, but that I can’t change because it is part of the goals of the course”. This can be done in a handout or in a set of PowerPoint slides (you can use the Windows ‘snipping tool’ or use Photoshop and plunk them right
into PowerPoint.) Don’t report on ALL the questions—just the ones that seem most important to you and to the students.

Whatever you do next: DO the things you have promised to change, and students will really see how you are respecting them as colleagues. Doing so might even positively affect the end-of-term student evaluations!

- **Lesson questionnaire at the end of class** with 4-6 short answer specific considerations that can be rated or commented on. You can ask about level of difficulty, use of class time, pace of the class, degree of engagement in lesson, and/or specific suggestions for change.

- **Student focus group** You or a colleague can conduct an informal feedback session with your students during the concluding 10 minutes of one class. Students can be asked to meet in small groups with a recorder who will summarize suggestions and positive comments from the group. You can have general questions such as:
  - What is working well for you or not?
  - What are the most positive aspects of the course?
  - What suggestions might you have for course improvement?
  - A colleague or student can collect and organize the comments or provide them as is.

- **Management committee feedback form.** Establish a student liaison or management committee. You can ask for volunteers or have an appointed/elected group of 2-4 to meet with you periodically outside of class to provide a gauge for how well the content and instruction is working for class members. Students need to know who the liaison committee members are. If teaching multiple sections you can have one delegate from each volunteered, appointed, or elected. Meet with the committee once or twice in the term and acknowledge the meeting results with the rest of the class.

- **Suggestion Boxes.** Have a place for written anonymous suggestions for course content, course comments, questions, student needs, and lesson presentations. You can have a locked box in a convenient location. The back of a classroom or department office are possible locations.

- **Digital student survey.** You can solicit student feedback with an electronic survey through VIULearn (D2L). This strategy has many positive features such as anonymity, efficiency, ease of use, and statistical analysis. Surveys can be used multiple times or at the end of the course.
- **E-mail or other discussion groups** (blogs, wikis) can be useful in responding to facilitating communication and acknowledging student needs and input. Students appreciate a timely response.

- **Individual student interviews.** Carefully select students from the class who will provide honest and sincere feedback on how the course is progressing from a student perspective. Summarize the main points of the interview in terms of what is going well and possible changes for both the immediate and future.

- **Closing Course Outcome review.** Make copies of your course outcome page from your course outline. Ask students to review/evaluate the intended outcomes by rating or commenting on the degree to which the outcome was achieved. This anonymous information can be collected and should provide excellent feedback on your teaching.

**Some general suggestions for communicating with students about their feedback**

- Any feedback provided to should be responded to with gratitude and a sharing of what actions might result from it.

- Do not get swayed by the inevitable few negative comments, (easier said than done!) There is always some negative energy if you look for it. Look for the entire positive and patterns in the constructive criticism.

- Record suggestions and you might change in the course (turnaround time for assignments), or for next year (the text was not good or needed), or not change (having a final exam).

**Peer/Colleague Feedback**

Another valuable way of receiving feedback on your teaching is through peer review. In their own classrooms, instructors are often so busy presenting information, facilitating discussions, monitoring student groups, answering questions, and keeping an eye on the time that they may not notice issues that can negatively impact learning. Having a peer in the classroom who is expressly dedicated to observation can be invaluable.

In peer review, a colleague sits in on a class and offers feedback from a different perspective. Peer review does not have to involve advice or judgment. Often just having more information on what is going on in class can make a big difference in how an instructor prepares and presents lessons.
In some institutions, formal peer review programs exist, often as a requirement for new instructors and sometimes as a professional development option for tenured instructors. Generally, a team of more experienced instructors make observations and comments on the teaching dynamics they observe in a classroom.

Informal peer review is another option. This can be as simple as asking a colleague to sit in on a class meeting and take notes on what she sees and experiences. It's best to ask a more experienced colleague, but even a novice can provide valuable feedback. Let that person know what specifically you would like feedback on—presenting information clearly, facilitating groups, or fostering a welcoming community.

Contact the Centre for Innovation and Excellence in Learning for a free copy of our **VIU Guide to Peer Observation for Reflective Practice** which includes detailed information for how and why to conduct peer observations.

**Self-Reflection and the Course Portfolio**

Following each class, go to your office and write down what you felt worked and did not work for that day and why. Make note of things that you would like to keep the next time you deliver this class and things you should change. It is also a good idea to record any questions that students asked so that you can address them in the next delivery of the class. This tool can also be effective as an ongoing self-evaluation and can be a way to determine what you would like to change or keep the same in any teaching situation (i.e., delivery style).

If you are interested scholarly approaches to reflecting on your teaching, you might also consider putting together a Course Portfolio. A course portfolio is a coherent narrative or investigation of a specific course that is documented as it is being taught. It allows you to make a study of your course, and make conclusions about such things as:

- How well the course learning goals match actual student learning,
- a description of changes that you plan to make the next time the course is taught, and a record that can become a scholarship of teaching and learning project
- a deeper reflection on what you have learned in the process of writing the course portfolio, and clarification of further questions you might pursue about your teaching and learning strategies.

*For more about Course Portfolios, see Hutchings, Pat, (2205) The Course Portfolio: How Faculty can Examine their Teaching to Advance Practice and Improve Student Learning. Stylus Publishing, Sterling, VA*
Teaching Portfolios

“The teaching portfolio is a collection of materials that document teaching performance.”
(Seldin, 1991)

Teaching portfolios can serve many purposes, some of which include the following:

- Reflecting on your learning outcomes as a teacher
- Assessing your teaching strengths and areas which need improvement
- Documenting your progress as a teacher
- Generating ideas for future teaching/course development
- Identifying your personal teaching style
- Using elements of the portfolio to promote dialogue with fellow teachers
- Considering new ways of gathering student feedback
- Gathering detailed data to support your goals
- Collecting multiple sources of evidence that document the implementation of your teaching goals and their success

Contents of a Teaching Portfolio

- Teaching Responsibilities
- Statement of Teaching Philosophy
- Teaching Methodology, Strategies, Objectives
- Description of Course Materials (Syllabi, Handouts, Assignments)
- Teaching Goals: Short- and Long-Term
- Efforts to Improve Teaching
- Student Ratings
- Innovations in Teaching
- Products of Teaching (Evidence of Student Learning)


For more information about how to create a Teaching Portfolio, contact the Centre for Innovation and Excellence at Learn support@viu.ca

“What we learn with pleasure we never forget.”
— Alfred Mercier