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**April, 2006**

**Obtaining and applying students' feedback along the semester.**

One of my concerns since I started teaching at the college level was obtaining feedback from my students. I realized very quickly that, out of politeness, students were not willing to speak about our class during our class time, regardless of how many times I asked. I was always eagerly awaiting the student's evaluations back to see what students liked most or least as well as ideas students might have had to improve the course. It always seemed very unfair to me that after reading the evaluations, it was always too late for those students who filled them out to enjoy and participate in those changes/improvements. I decided to have students fill out my own evaluations a month after classes started, and six weeks after that.

Although I thought about designing my own evaluation tool, I decided against it and kept it simple. I handed out blank pieces of paper and I asked them to write anything and everything they had to say about how the class and how it was working for them up to that point. I told them that any criticism to help improve the class and cater better to them would be appreciated. These evaluations were filled out anonymously. I gave informal evaluations twice a semester. This allowed for important things to happen: it gave everyone in the classroom a voice to express their concerns, their likes and dislikes and, at the same time, it gave me a chance to know them better and learn what types of learners they were. Also, that information helped me redesign my classes,

my teaching or my syllabus if needed. This was extremely helpful when dealing with classes I had never taught before.

This activity has a very obvious setback: the instructor needs to be very objective and sensible when reading the comments, as some of the requests/suggestions are unreasonable to comply with. For instance: I teach Spanish, and it is the policy in our department that all instructors teach in the target language, although we are positive some students do not appreciate this. I have had some students whose suggestions are that I teach in English. These are just a few isolated cases, though. Most students provide very insightful comments about the class as a whole and their learning preferences. The positive comments are very encouraging and help me locate the areas in which I am teaching well. The negative or not-so-positive comments are used as tools for self-improvement. There are also comments that allow the instructor to address students and explain more in depth the rationale behind the way we do things. As a case in point the example above can be used.

By doing this twice a semester along with the formal evaluations, I have acquired a deeper understanding of the different types of students in my class, their needs and my work as a facilitator. It is also fairer to our students, as I feel that I try to reach them and cater to them before it is too late and there is nothing more I can do for them. I would suggest this to be done in every single class you teach, even if it is a class that you have taught before. Every class has its own personality, energy and academic level, which may influence greatly our teaching and our syllabus.