I. Background

At an October 2016 meeting with Provost Katherine Fleming and Senior Presidential Fellow Ellen Schall, members of the Full-Time Continuing Contract Faculty Senators Council (C-FSC) Steering Committee expressed interest in schools’ promoting the practice of soliciting midterm course feedback. The Senators observed that getting student feedback early in the semester (rather than only at the end) can contribute to the success of a course, since it not only enables instructors to make adjustments to their pedagogy and/or syllabus but can also enhance student engagement or “buy-in.” It also enables instructors to hear from students who might withdraw from the course prior to the more formal evaluation at the end of the semester.

At the request of Provost Fleming, the Undergraduate Academic Affairs Committee took up this topic in the fall 2016 semester. Committee chair Matthew Santirocco (Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs) also discussed it with the Undergraduate Deans, whom he convenes on a monthly basis.

Both groups strongly endorsed the idea of midterm course feedback. This is by no means a new practice at NYU; in fact, structures are already in place in most undergraduate units to support and/or promote informal midterm course surveys. Section II below provides an overview of what the relevant units are currently doing in this regard.

II. Current practices

- CAS. Although many faculty solicit midterm course feedback, this has not been historically promoted or coordinated by the Dean’s Office. But in response to the recent discussions noted above (see section I) the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs raised this topic with the Directors of Undergraduate Studies at their November 2016 meeting, and that group endorsed the idea.

- COLLEGE CORE CURRICULUM (CCC). The CCC has long offered formal support to new faculty (and to faculty teaching new courses) who wish to conduct midterm course surveys. While optional, these CCC-administered surveys give faculty extensive quantitative feedback on both the lecture and the individual sections.
- COLLEGE OF GLOBAL PUBLIC HEALTH. Midterm course feedback is mandatory for all fall and spring courses. It is used solely to enable faculty to gauge how they are doing and to learn of any changes they might consider making. (The results are not recorded by the Dean’s Office.) The same survey is used for all courses, and it is administered through Albert.

- GALLATIN. The Senior Director of Faculty Affairs sends a note to faculty at the start of every semester, directing them to a [website](#) containing a list of recommended questions (e.g., “What is helpful to your learning?”; “What suggestions do you have for change?”) that they can include in a survey of their students. Faculty are responsible for administering these optional surveys themselves (either on paper or online), and they alone have access to the responses.

- EXPOSITORY WRITING PROGRAM (CAS). Faculty are encouraged, though not required, to solicit student feedback after each of the two major essays are due. Many faculty ask students to comment on their experience of working on these essays.

- GLOBAL PROGRAMS. At the global sites, midterm course surveys are required for all new lecturers. In addition, they are required for continuing lecturers, but only if they have received low end-of-term course evaluations in the previous semester.

- LIBERAL STUDIES (LS). Faculty are encouraged to solicit student feedback around midterms, either using questions copied from the end-of-semester survey or using their own questions (which can be tailored to particular course learning goals). LS has also offered support to faculty in using Google Forms or Qualtrics for this purpose, and in spring 2016 conducted a workshop (in collaboration with FAS Educational Technology) on methods of gathering student feedback. Plans are currently underway to develop templates to facilitate midterm surveys.

- MEYER. Midterm course surveys are promoted informally as part of a larger faculty development effort.

- NYU ABU DHABI (NYUAD). There are no formal midterm course surveys, and faculty who wish to administer them do so independently.

- NYU SHANGHAI (NYUSH). A midterm survey is administered online (using Google Forms) for all classes. It consists of three open-ended questions, which are designed to elicit comments, requests, and reflection from students. This feedback can influence the way the course is taught for the remainder of the semester, or it may prompt faculty to respond to students’ concerns in other ways. Normally, only the faculty member sees the results. But if there is serious concern over how the course is being taught, then the results may be reviewed by an Area Leader, a Dean, or the Provost.
• SILVER. Faculty are asked to solicit feedback on their courses at a mid-range point. The three suggested questions are (1) “what are the questions or concerns that you have about the course or your performance in the course”; (2) “are there topics that you would like to discuss that we are not scheduled to discuss”; and (3) “what feedback do you have to offer for the course so far?” Some faculty take a different approach and tailor the questionnaire to their own needs. Since this is a voluntary exercise, not all faculty conduct these midterm surveys.

• SPS. All faculty teaching credit-bearing courses are required to conduct midterm course surveys in their classes. While the feedback that these surveys generate is not shared with the Dean’s Office, faculty are asked to report at the end of the year on the impact that this process had on their teaching.

• STEINHARDT. An advisory committee is currently being established that will (among other things) work with individual departments to promote voluntary midterm course surveys.

• STERN. Midterm course surveys are promoted during new faculty orientation, and this practice is also recommended to junior faculty during their mandatory consultations with the Stern Teaching Effectiveness Program (STEP).

• TANDON. There is no such requirement or promotion of this practice, and faculty who wish to administer midterm surveys do so independently.

• TISCH. Current conversations around midterm course feedback are part of a larger sensitivity training initiative that arose in response to faculty concerns about the new Bias Response Line.

• WAGNER. Faculty are encouraged and reminded every semester to solicit midterm feedback, and a common form is provided for this purpose. The two questions are (1) “what has worked well in the course so far”; and (2) “how could this course be improved?” New adjuncts are required to administer midterm surveys. The Dean’s Office does not collect survey responses.

III. Recommendations

1. Midterm course feedback should be promoted at the school level, not at the University level. All categories of faculty (tenured/tenure-track faculty, full-time continuing contract faculty, and adjunct faculty) should be encouraged to solicit student feedback at an appropriate point in the semester. This should be viewed as a non-punitive means of improving pedagogy and of enhancing the exchange of knowledge and learning. For this reason, the feedback should be private between the students and the faculty member.
2. With regard to the content of the surveys, schools should provide sample questions that faculty can tailor to the specifics of their course. (As noted above in section II, many schools already do this.) One example of a basic survey structure is the “Keep/Stop/Start” model—i.e., (a) “what should I keep doing in this course”; (b) “what should I stop doing”; and (c) “what should I start doing?”

3. The actual midpoint of the 14-week semester (i.e., the seventh week) may be too late for faculty to solicit helpful student feedback. Doing so earlier in the term not only makes it easier for instructors to make necessary changes to their course, but may also ensure a higher survey response rate.

4. One useful survey tool that could be promoted is the quiz function in NYU Classes. (This involves turning off grading and anonymizing results.)

5. In addition to promoting midterm feedback, schools should explore creating opportunities for peer-to-peer faculty mentoring in, e.g., responding to student feedback through changes in pedagogy. One existing model for this is the Academy of Distinguished Educators at Dentistry, which oversees activities and publishes an online journal, JADE, to “promote the free exchange of ideas regarding higher educational theory, methods, and tools.” Another model is the Expository Writing Program’s creation of “mentor groups,” which are designed to provide pedagogical support for new faculty. At the University level, the Center for the Advancement of Teaching could serve as a hub for peer-to-peer mentoring across schools. Among the various forms this could take is to engage recipients of NYU’s Distinguished Teaching Award to provide guidance for their peers regarding effective teaching practices.

6. The UAAC should revisit this topic at a later point, to explore how the various schools have adopted these recommendations, and what effect (if any) they have had on teaching.