Undergraduate Academic Affairs Committee
Advisory on Mid-Semester Feedback

Spring 2023

In this advisory, the Undergraduate Academic Affairs Committee (UAAC) endorses the view that all NYU instructors should solicit mid-semester student feedback as a best educational practice. Our consensus is that University-level teaching and technology support could both encourage and facilitate more faculty members to engage in this practice, to their own benefit and to the benefit of students. Two of the recommendations included in this advisory address ways in which the University can better support faculty in soliciting mid-semester feedback. An additional two recommendations offer practical advice for colleagues who wish to adopt this practice.

The Committee first explored this topic in Fall 2016, conducting a landscape survey of mid-semester feedback practices across the University. In Spring 2022, given the new realities of teaching brought into relief by the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to the emerging need for greater attentiveness to students’ engagement with their courses, there was consensus within the Committee that mid-semester feedback was a timely and important topic to revisit.

Some NYU faculty already administer class surveys at an early point in the semester to solicit formative feedback on their teaching. These surveys enable faculty to learn about their students’ experiences in the course and to identify which pedagogical practices are working well and which are not. Obtaining student feedback on a course while there is still time to make adjustments can both improve learning outcomes and contribute to a more engaged and collaborative class environment.

Mid-semester course surveys are not currently mandated by the Provost’s Office, unlike end-of-semester course feedback, which serves a different purpose. The UAAC’s Fall 2016 advisory revealed that a few schools require mid-semester surveys, some schools promote and provide support for them, and a handful of schools do neither. The Committee strongly endorses the practice of collecting mid-semester feedback and submits the following recommendations for supporting its implementation across the University:

1. Instructional technology support. The current instructional technology environment at NYU is markedly different from Fall 2016. Faculty are much more familiar with the digital tools that are available to them, in part because of the emergency pivot to remote instruction in Spring 2020. In addition, a new learning management system, NYU Brightspace, has been implemented University-wide. Within this context, supporting mid-semester surveys should be relatively straightforward and will likely not necessitate
the licensing of additional technologies. The basic requirements are the ability to administer anonymous surveys and to ensure that responses are visible only to the faculty member. (Mid-semester student feedback is specifically for providing information to faculty members, not department chairs, Deans, or program directors.\(^1\))

There are a few NYU-licensed platforms that already meet these needs, such as Google Forms and Qualtrics, but guidance should be provided to faculty on how to use them. In addition, since making mid-semester surveys as easy as possible for faculty to administer is the goal, NYU IT should be asked to explore how NYU Brightspace might be leveraged for this purpose. It would be particularly advantageous to add a pre-programmed module to NYU Brightspace so that faculty members could readily activate the survey. This goal could be achieved through collaboration between the UAAC, the Provost’s Office, and NYU IT. To encourage adoption, three or four basic templates from which faculty can choose would ideally be created, with input from the UAAC.\(^2\)

2. *Teaching support.* The Committee’s assessment is that University-level resources are needed to support faculty in soliciting and responding to student feedback. Workshops could focus on how to determine the ideal timing for mid-semester surveys, setting student expectations, and deciding which kinds of comments merit adjustments in teaching methodology. We note that the Learning Experience Design team in the Provost’s Office offered a successful TeachTalk this semester entitled “Why Wait: Using Real-Time Student Feedback to Improve Your Course.” Workshops like these should be offered regularly to help faculty members consider the pedagogical and logistical issues of mid-semester student feedback. In addition, it would be helpful to create online resources for faculty, such as the University of Toronto’s web page on Gathering Formative Feedback with Mid-Course Evaluations.

3. *Timing of mid-semester surveys.* Determining the appropriate moment in the semester for administering mid-semester surveys is an important part of this practice. The advantage of early surveys is that they allow time for implementing changes in response to student feedback. One potentially opportune moment is following an early midterm exam, at which point students should have a better sense of how assessments align with learning goals for the course. A survey administered after the midterm might reflect on any of the following: teaching methods, explanations of difficult materials, the ways class time is used, testing practices, student preparation, or the broader goals of the course.

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\(^1\) An additional factor to consider is whether to enable teaching assistants for the course to access survey responses.

\(^2\) The Committee’s Fall 2016 advisory provides examples of basic “Keep/Start/Stop” survey models that schools and departments have used.
4. *Setting expectations.* It is helpful to clarify for students why their feedback is being solicited and to state how it will be used. One best practice is to review the most common suggestions with the class after the survey is concluded, explaining which ones will or will not be implemented in relation to the learning goals of the course. This review will create the opportunity for faculty members and students to have a constructive dialogue about both the course and the proposed changes to it.