



Teaching Concerns

Newsletter of the Teaching Resource Center for Faculty and Teaching Assistants

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Teaching Idea: Using a Mid-Term Evaluation to Give Students Responsibility for the Course

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In ENWR 101, the basic composition course for the College, we notify our students of their mid-term progress. At this time, I always hand out a list of evaluation questions for the students to evaluate me also. This semester I modified my procedure to allow the students to evaluate not only me, but each other as well. This new procedure significantly improved my students' classroom behavior, and I recommend it as a way to make the students recognize their own responsibility for their education.

Previously, I had trouble getting my students to function as a coherent class. They were reluctant to participate in class discussions, and they often had not read the assigned material. All my previous attempts to correct this situation had failed. Finally, when it was time for mid-term evaluations, I included two new questions for the students to answer:

- 1) "What is the one thing you want me to do to improve the course?"
- 2) "What is the one thing you want the other students to do to improve the course?"

criticize themselves and the other students for failing to participate in the class.

After receiving the evaluations, I typed the responses on one page, selecting the most helpful responses from the other questions on the evaluation, but including all the responses to Question #2 above. I then distributed this page of responses to the class and commented briefly on responses I had received and how I would address those directed at me. I don't know whether it was the objective analysis that resulted from writing down the answer to the question, or the peer pressure of reading what other students had said about their behavior, but I noticed a distinct change in my class after this point. The students became more active in class discussion and came to class more prepared, because they were more conscious of how the other students perceived them, and they wanted to live up to the standards they themselves had set.

In sum, I agree that it's helpful to ask students mid-term evaluation questions, such as those Charles Heuchert discussed in the November 1992 *Teaching Concerns*, but I also recommend adding a question that makes the students evaluate themselves. In this way, they come to terms with the ways in which they are responsible for the success or failure of the course.

The students gave remarkably honest responses to these questions. They did not hesitate to