


MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

November 19, 2014

MEMORANDUM

TO: University Committee on Undergraduate Education

FROM: Teresa Bitner, on behalf of the Mid-Semester Formative Feedback Committee 

SUBJECT: Mid-Semester Formative Feedback Recommendations

Background:

The Associated Students of Michigan State University (ASMSU) in February of 2013 passed legislation advocating an interim, informal course evaluation to be implemented early in the semester. The rationale behind this type of assessment is to provide faculty members with formative feedback, which they can utilize to better connect with their students and thereby improve various aspects of the course. The University Committee on Undergraduate Education then created a subcommittee to research and consider ASMSU's proposal.

Findings:

The UCUE Formative Feedback subcommittee conducted two sample surveys in March of 2014, one targeting faculty, and the other, students. The response rate was disappointing, with only 6% of the faculty (n=167) and 1% of students (N=376) responding. From those who did respond, it can be extrapolated that roughly 70% of faculty would recommend some form of early formative feedback system. The faculty responses stating the benefits of using such a system included improved student-instructor communication, engagement by empowering students, and provision of an opportunity to make positive course changes during the semester. Over 75% of faculty who responded were either interested in or neutral about incorporating some form of formative feedback system into their courses. However, concerns were expressed regarding a mandated system.

67.3% of the students who responded expressed support of including formative feedback to complement the end-of-semester student evaluations and 24.7% responded neutrally. Of note, only 35.2% of the respondents felt comfortable or very comfortable approaching an instructor about instructional problems or concerns.

Conclusions:

Evidence-based studies and anecdotal commentary suggest that the use of formative feedback early in the semester is beneficial for both instructors and students. The faculty survey suggested that, although most faculty would be supportive of the practice, they



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would not want a standardized, mandated model imposed upon them. From the student survey, there is support for the incorporation of anonymous feedback during the course of the semester. Almost two-thirds of students do not feel comfortable approaching their instructors with formative feedback in a face-to-face situation. To bridge the gap, creating a process for receiving anonymous feedback during the semester would enable these students to share their concerns more comfortably. The survey results were very informative; however, no concrete conclusions can be reached from the results given the low survey response rate.

Recommendations:

After much discussion and consideration of the sample surveys, the subcommittee recognizes the value of instructors incorporating some form of formative feedback into their courses either mid-semester or earlier. Therefore, the subcommittee recommends that instructors consider the benefits yielded by this practice and integrate a means of receiving anonymous feedback into their courses, perhaps utilizing the models provided by MSU's Office of Faculty and Organizational Development.



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