



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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What Do Students Really Want?

Providing students with the class syllabus is a top priority at the beginning of each semester. It is by understanding the class syllabus that students know what's expected of them for the semester. However, during the process of discussing the syllabus, I realized I had little knowledge about what students expected from me. In order to gather more insight into students' expectations, I decided to conduct a survey that would provide this information.

The Survey

On the first day of the fall 2017 semester I asked my students to participate in a quick survey about their expectations for me and the class. I used PowerPoint to develop my survey. I prepared a simple two-slide questionnaire titled, "Great Expectations" with the subtitle "What can I do to help?" The second page was titled, "List 10 things you expect from me in this course," and at the bottom of the second page I added, "You don't have to give your name if you prefer not to."

Obtaining opinions from 18 students is not a significant enough sample to provide an overall conclusion for all students in various classroom environments. However, the survey results provided me with enough valuable information to make practical decisions about those students enrolled in my class.

I read all of the survey responses on the first day of class and on the second day I discussed them with my students. I thanked them for their participation and reminded them that without their comments, I would not know what they expected from me or the class. The survey also demonstrated that I was open to feedback and willing to listen to their opinions.

All of my students listed 10 things they expected from me. The students' expectations were very diverse, but there were also similar comments. For example, "start class on time" and "answer emails" were mentioned twelve and nine times, respectively. More than half of the students included the comments, "do not give fewer tests," "do not reduce the workload," and "do not allow the use of cellphones."

I was surprised by the frequency of comments concerning starting class on time. Starting the class on time, in spite of the fact that I always do, certainly was not something I deemed to be that important to them. However, based on the survey responses, starting class as scheduled was a top priority for my students. Many community college students work and have to balance part- or full-time jobs with class schedules. Thus, it is understandable why students

want their instructors to be organized and punctual.

I was also amazed by the number of responses that mentioned the need for me to answer emails in a timely manner. I have heard students complain about instructors who do not respond promptly or at all to emails. Therefore, I already am familiar with the frustration experienced by students as a result of delayed responses to their emails. This survey response reiterated to me how important it is to respond in a timely fashion to students' emails.

One of the most unanticipated comments I received pertained to cellphone usage. Students commented that they did not want me to use my cellphone during class. I believe this feedback is related to students' positive reactions to my no-cellphone policy. Often times when instructors expect certain behaviors from students, students in return expect the same conduct from their instructors.

I also received several comments addressing presentation techniques and how students like to learn in a lecture environment. For instance, students wrote that they like it when instructors speak clearly and explain material thoroughly. While that response might seem like common sense, at times instructors can rush through lectures and use jargon unfamiliar to students. To prevent confusion among students, instructors can create stopping points during the lecture to gauge students' understanding of the subject matter.

Other suggestions I received from the survey included:

- Have fair due dates
- Don't change due dates
- Provide help when asked
- End class on time
- Make class interesting
- Give timely feedback on essays
- Keep grade postings current
- Be available to students
- Keep class instruction moving by stopping irrelevant side conversations
- Have a positive attitude
- Sometimes slow down the pace of the lecture
- Provide in-depth information about certain subjects
- Be organized
- Check attendance
- Teach new things
- Provide outside class help
- Be understanding and reasonable
- Do not allow students to be disruptive
- Notify students promptly if class is canceled
- Notify students about changes in the schedule

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- Announce Blackboard postings
 - Answer questions fully

I integrated the survey feedback into my semester plans by acknowledging the comments I was previously unaware of and reinforcing changes I had already implemented (i.e., starting class on time, responding to emails). Keeping grades constantly updated was a concern expressed in all classes. Consequently, I made sure to post grades in a timely manner in order to alleviate this concern. Most importantly, I paid close attention to feedback that I could apply to my teaching style. For instance, I now pay more attention to students' concerns about using too many in-class presentations. I tend to rely on presentations because they allow me to adhere to the class schedule and cover all of the course material. However, as a result of student feedback, I adjusted my teaching style and found alternative ways to deliver the information using two-way classroom discussions and question and answer forums.

Also, I will use the students' answers the following day to give them an opportunity to write a short paper in class defining how some of the suggestions could be implemented. This should give them a chance to feel they have some ownership in how the class is managed, while at the same time providing me with one more way to gain knowledge about their writing skills.

Because the results were so valuable to me, I plan to continue conducting the survey the day after I discuss the syllabus with students. The survey has not only benefitted me, but it also reassures my students that I am interested in their expectations, setting the stage for a positive classroom environment that encourages student success.

What do your students expect from you? Tell us in the comment section or on [Facebook!](#)

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