

Methods for Assessing Student Learning & Engagement

The goal is to discover how students are doing in the class, what they know or don't know, whether they are engaged with the course. The more information we have about what students do or don't know and what their assumptions are, the better we can target our teaching. Most of us fly blind most of the time. Following are some ways to gather information:

The one-minute paper. Students answer two questions at the end of class:

- 1) What's the main point of the class or/ what's the main thing you learned today?
- 2) What question do you still have or/ what's the muddiest part of the lecture?

Pre-and post assessment: Devise several questions for students to answer at the beginning of the semester (or class) that will let you know their knowledge and skill level and that will get at their underlying assumptions about the material. Ask the same questions at the end of the semester, to determine whether they have learned what you hoped. You might also ask these questions part-way through the course.

Clickers: Use clickers to ask questions and see how students understand the material in the middle of discussions or lectures.

Mid-course evaluation: After four or five weeks of classes, ask students anonymously what's working and what improvements you might make to help them learn more effectively. ALWAYS discuss the results with students, so they know you have read them and taken them seriously. It is often helpful to discuss them with another person -- a colleague or the Director of Professional Pedagogy.

Focus/Advisory groups: In a large class, pick 6-10 people at random, or one from each section, to meet with you every two weeks to talk about how the course is going. Do more listening than talking in these meetings.

Give frequent short assignments and feedback on them: If the assignments/questions are suitably framed, you will gather a lot of information about how students are understanding the material. Some professors ask students to answer the questions before class, so that they will know what students do and don't understand about the material before the class begins and can focus the class accordingly.

Get videotaped or ask someone to visit your class: Watch the videotape with the Director of Professional Pedagogy, who can help you see how students are interacting with you, with each other, and with the material.

Group Instructional Feedback: Ask an outsider to ask students in groups of four or five the following questions: What works? What is not working? What suggestions do you have to improve the class? The outsider then polls the group as a whole for their answers. And reports on the conversation to the professor. Thus students can speak anonymously (outsider doesn't know who they are), and the focus is on solutions rather than complaints.