

Proposal for Pilot Project: Midterm Evaluations of Teaching (MEoT)

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Summary

This document sets out the rationale and implementation details for a pilot project to introduce and evaluate formative mid-term evaluations of teaching within academic departments at UBC. It is presented as a joint proposal between the AMS and CTLT.

1 Background and context

At the outset, it is important to identify what the purpose and function of midterm evaluations of teaching (MEoTs) are, the precedence for them at UBC, the benefits to both instructor and student stakeholder groups, and their relationship to other teaching evaluations at UBC.

Midterm course evaluations are an opportunity for instructors to solicit and students to give feedback partway through a course delivery cycle, to facilitate dialogue about why the course is designed and delivered the way it is and to collect student viewpoints about various aspects of the course. It is intended to be a formative evaluation, undertaken in a spirit of partnership between instructors and students. MEoTs address one of the obvious failings of end-of-course evaluations, namely that any feedback provided at the end of a course cycle comes too late for an instructor to either capitalize on positive feedback or address issues raised for the current cohort of students.

MEoTs are not a radical new concept. Many instructors already perform these informally within their classes at UBC and indeed the guide for new faculty¹ provides advice on how to incorporate this feedback loop into course delivery. The Sauder School of Business, in partnership with the Commerce Undergraduate Society, has established a successful and robust midterm evaluation process for all undergraduate courses. We do not seek to reinvent the wheel here, but instead start from the premise that MEoTs form part of the valuable set of formative feedback processes that inform the teaching and learning process, and as such should be undertaken in all courses, regardless of level, discipline or delivery modality. It is simply part of being part of a reflective community of scholars, either as a teacher or a learner.

Previous studies reported in the literature have suggested a range of potential benefits:

¹ Sibley, J., Canuto, L. *Guide to Teaching for New Faculty at UBC*. (The University of British Columbia, 2010), 38.

- On average, instructors who conduct midterm course evaluations perform better on end of term evaluations^{2,3,4}
- Students are more likely to take teaching evaluations more seriously if they see that their input matters⁴
- Midterm course evaluations improve student perceptions of both the instructor's commitment to teaching and their concern for students' performance⁴
- Sustained administration of formative evaluations leads to a continuation of positive changes to teaching scores over time⁵

MEOs occupy a different and distinctive space in the general area of evaluation of teaching. They are quite distinct from the more formal, summative SEoT process at the end of a course. Whilst elements of SEoT data are shared more broadly, MEOs are intended to form a conversation between instructor and class, with no expectation of being used to formally evaluate teaching⁶. Likewise, the formal (summative) Peer Review of Teaching process, developed in partnership with Faculty representatives between 2010-12, is a distinct and different process.

2 Principles for MEO

A MEO should be:

- Done in partnership between students and the course team
This is a collaborative enterprise intended to guide the course experience for present and future students. Without being prescriptive, examples of how this partnership could be enacted might include: a dialogue with the class or class representatives to set questions on the MEO.
- Part of the valuable formative feedback process on teaching and learning
As reflective educators, seeking and acting upon feedback is part of the process of what we do. As engaged students, providing legitimate and constructive feedback is an important contribution.
- Separate from, but complementary to, other teaching evaluations (eg end of course, peer review etc)

² Prince, A.R. and Goldman, M., "Improving part-time faculty instruction," *Teaching of Psychology*, 8, no. 3 (1981): 160-162.

³ Overall, J. U., and March, H.W., "Midterm feedback from students: its relationship to instructional improvement and students: Cognitive and affective outcomes," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 71 (1979): 856-865.

⁴ Brown, M. J., "Student Perceptions of Teaching Evaluations," *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 35, no. 2 (2008): 177-181.

⁵ Wilson, R.C., "Improving faculty teaching: Effective use of student evaluations and consultants," *Journal of Higher Education*, 57, no. 2 (1986): 196-211.

⁶ That said, there is no reason why data from MEOs cannot be used by an instructor as evidence to contribute to a teaching dossier, which is considered as part of a formal evaluation process to inform decisions relating to promotion and tenure.

SEoT and PRT have valuable and distinct functions in the teaching and learning process, but this is something different.

- Constructive and meaningful, to support and enhance teaching and learning
There are roles and responsibilities on both sides. Students have a responsibility to take part and be constructive. Faculty have a responsibility to review, attend to and, where appropriate, act on feedback provided.
- Locally-relevant, taking account of disciplinary norms and practice.
This is not a top-down, prescriptive recipe. Instead, instructors are free to use whatever evaluation material, data collection methods and reporting structures to make use of feedback gathered. Some may choose to evaluate particular aspects of a course; to collect data, some may use 'minute papers' in class, some may use online data collection⁷, some clicker questions in class⁸. Different questions sets may be asked as appropriate to different courses / disciplines. There is value in diversity and a degree of experimentation provided we can capture what is found to be effective and why.

3 Pilot project background and participants

This pilot project sparked from a discussion in the Student Evaluation of Teaching Implementation committee regarding student perceptions of teaching evaluations. The conversation led to a discussion around methods of continuous feedback for instructors, citing the joint student and faculty model of midterm evaluations used by Sauder as an example. The AMS offered to take the lead in proposing a pilot project of midterm evaluations in each undergraduate faculty in partnership with its respective undergraduate student society. Through further discussions a partnership between the AMS and CTLT was established to design, implement and evaluate a pilot project.

The AMS is working with each undergraduate society to set up a pilot project in their faculty. The approach will be to select at least one well-respected instructor in each department to pilot the midterm evaluations for one term and have their class take part in a closing feedback process as described in this document. The rationale behind this approach is to utilize instructors that are open to trying new methods of engaging their students, as they will be most receptive. These instructors can then share their experience with colleagues in their department to help communicate the benefits and value of MEOt.

In partnership with their respective Dean's Office, each undergraduate society is developing a shortlist of instructors to take part in the pilot project. These instructors will be contacted at the start of the academic session and those instructors who agree to participate will work with the student representative to introduce the pilot to their

⁷ There is the potential to be able to do this large-scale, with additional functionality within the *Outcomes* module of the LMS platform, likely to be available mid-2013.

⁸ Which can be asked in 'anonymous' mode.

participating course, collect the MEoT data, feedback to the class and to participate in a qualitative evaluation of the pilot project outlined in section 5.

Undergraduate Society representatives from Science, Engineering, Arts and Kinesiology will be working with their respective Dean's Office to identify potential participants and run the pilot project in their faculty.

4 Pilot project resources

In order to support pilot project participants, we are currently developing a collection of resources / documentation enabling instructors to design and deploy a MEoT that fits their particular course. Topics and resources will include:

- Best practices and hints for incorporating MEoT into a course
- Sample questions / MEoTs used elsewhere
- Examples of data collection methods (e.g. minute papers, online, clicker questions)
- Efficient analysis and strategies for feed back to class

A draft of these resources is included as an Appendix to this document.

5 Pilot Project Evaluation

Evaluating the implementation of this pilot⁹ will enable us to:

- engage directly with instructors and students to identify their perceptions of the benefits and challenges to MEoTs;
- identify and disseminate best practice and inform any future roll-out of MEoTs more widely.

The emphasis will be on perceptions of the benefits / challenges and the impact on the classroom environment rather than quantitative data on improvements etc. A short questionnaire will be developed with CTLT and will be deployed online, available to all instructors and students who have been through a MEoT. The timing of the survey will be such as to be approximately 1-2 weeks after the MEoT, but sufficiently far ahead of end-of-course evaluations.

⁹ Appropriate BREB approval will be sought if required.

Appendix A: Resources for Pilot Project Participants

This short document is intended to serve as an *aide memoire* for instructors when designing and planning a Midterm Evaluation of Teaching (MEoT). It is an approximately chronological set of hints and guidance that covers the entire lifecycle of a MEoT.

1. Setting out your stall

It is certainly worth taking just a couple of minutes of class time to communicate the principles and purpose of a MEoT, the expectations you have of students taking part in it (i.e. to provide considered, constructive and useful feedback to the questions you select) and what they can expect of you subsequently (i.e. to read and where appropriate respond to their comments).

2. Keep it short!

It may be tempting to ask about all different aspects of a course, but this is an area where less is more. It is best to consider carefully what is it that you really want feedback on? Perhaps you've changed something about the course significantly since the last time it was given? If you can limit yourself to a small number of well-considered questions, it is more likely that you achieve better participation from the class and thus get more meaningful feedback. A useful rule of thumb is no more than 5 questions, taking 2-3 minutes to respond to.

3. Example questions

We have collected a sample of questions / evaluations that have been used elsewhere that you may want to use and / or adapt in your own courses. The overriding rule, though, is to ask questions that will be most valuable for *your* course and *your* student cohort.

Some examples of areas of focus could include¹⁰:

- Learning objectives
- Content Delivery
- Student Participation
- Assessment and feedback
- Classroom climate
- Educational Technology
- Students' perception of level of difficulty, pace and workload
- Administration and Organization

4. Choose your capture method

There are different methods you may choose to collect the responses to the MEoT: in-class versus outside; online versus paper. Some instructors opt to conduct *paper*

¹⁰ Adapted from: Victoria University of Wellington, *Improving Teaching and Learning – Informal Feedback*, (Victoria University of Wellington Teaching Development Centre, 2004), 3-7.

based in class evaluations at the beginning of class to ensure students have adequate time to complete the evaluations and to ensure that feedback is not biased by a “good” or “bad” lecture. Index cards given to each student, with an answer written in each corner makes for easy evaluation of data. Online, out of class evaluation methods should be kept open for a duration that provides students just the right amount of time to complete the evaluation on their own schedule. If you routinely use clickers in your class, you may find this method of collecting data a good fit (with anonymous responses and results best *not* displayed in real time!)

5. Data, data everywhere

The volume of comments received can be overwhelming. In order to better organize comments, identify tangible areas of improvement and focus discussions, it may be helpful to group feedback into three areas¹¹:

- 1) Items that can be changed during the term
- 2) Items that cannot be changed in the current term but can be incorporated for future terms
- 3) Items that cannot be changed due to practical or pedagogical reasons

Grouping comments will allow you to address the suggestions at the right time and will also provide a general framework for discussion with students.

6. Closing the loop: strategies for feeding back to the class

Research has shown that MEoTs are most valuable to both instructors and students when there is a two way dialogue from things brought to light in the evaluations. Instructors who engage in a dialogue with students about their midterm feedback reported greater improvements in their final evaluation ratings¹². Discussing results in class with students will not only help to clarify the feedback but will also make students feel as though their input is being considered.

Share the results of the evaluation, including areas indicated as strengths and areas that need improvement, announcing changes that you intend to make while also providing rationale for teaching style, pedagogy and practicalities you do not intend to change. For recommendations that are unclear, engage in a dialogue with students to provide clarification and additional feedback.

¹¹ Adapted from: Victoria University of Wellington, *Improving Teaching and Learning – Informal Feedback*, (Victoria University of Wellington Teaching Development Centre, 2004), 9.

¹² McGowen, W.R., Osgathorpe, R.T., “Student and Faculty Perceptions of Effects of Midcourse Evaluation,” *To Improve the Academy* 29 (2011): 160-172.

Appendix B: Sample Questions

B.1 Stanford University Short Form

1. What about this course has been especially useful to you thus far?
2. What about this course, if anything, could be improved? If you have suggestions on how the improvements could be carried out, please indicate those as well.
3. Are there ways that you - and the other students - could make this course more effective?
4. Thus far, how would you rate this course?
 Poor Fair Good Very Good Excellent

Source: https://www.stanford.edu/dept/CTL/cgi-bin/images/Evaluation_short_example.pdf

B.2 Harvard Kennedy School of Government

B.2.1 Mid-course Feedback -- Form 1

I want your views on the course so far. Please answer the following questions anonymously. I will give 10 minutes of class time for your responses. If you need more space, please continue on the back.

1. Classes
Pace and Level (1 = much too slow/easy, 3 = just right, 5 = much too fast/hard)
Intellectual coherence and stimulation? (e.g., plenty; OK; not enough)
Practical applicability? (e.g., plenty, OK, not enough)
Amount of time I spend taking class questions, discussion (too much, too little, about right?)
Any specific suggestions or criticisms re my management of class sessions
2. Homework Assignments
Level of difficulty: (too hard, too easy, about right?)
Relevance/effectiveness for learning course material (1= terrible; 5=excellent)
Implementation (clarity of questions and answers, appropriateness of timing, etc.)
Specific criticisms or suggestions for improvement
3. Computer materials (Web pages, spreadsheets, lecture notes, etc.)
How often do you use them?
How useful? (1 = not at all; 5 = extremely)
Specific criticisms or suggestions for improvement
4. Review Sessions and Course Assistants
How useful are the Friday review sessions (1 = not at all; 5 = excellent)
Specific suggestions/criticisms on Review Sessions
How useful are CAs in office hours (1 = not at all; 5 = excellent)
Specific suggestions/criticisms on CA hours:
Usefulness and timeliness of feedback on Homework assignments (1= terrible; 5=

great)

Specific suggestions/criticisms on Homework feedback

5. Further comments on any aspect of the course. (Use back of page if necessary)

B.2.2 Mid-course Feedback: Form 2

- What do you like about this course? Please identify specific aspects of the course that have assisted your learning.
- What do you dislike about this course? Please identify specific aspects of the course that have hindered your learning.
- Is the level of intellectual challenge in this course appropriate? Is classroom discussion too inaccessible or too easily accessible? Please explain.
- Do you feel that busywork is a problem in this course? If busywork is a problem, how would you recommend changing the assignments? Please be specific.
- What do you think I could do to improve the learning process in the course? Please be specific.
- What could you and other students in the class do to improve the learning process in the course? How might you and they be persuaded to do what you are suggesting? Please be specific.

Source: <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/degrees/teaching-courses/evaluations/samples>

B.3 Suffolk

1. What aspects of this course ENHANCE your learning?
2. What aspects of this course can be IMPROVED?
3. What could YOU (as a student) do to make the course better for your classmates and the teacher?

Source: <http://www.suffolk.edu/research/47897.html>

B.4 Worcester Polytechnic Institute

1. Please describe one or two specific things that the instructor(s) is/are doing that help your learning in this course.
2. Please describe one or two specific things that the instructor(s) could do to improve student learning in this course.
3. Please identify one or two specific things that *you* could do to improve your learning in this course.

Source: [http://www.wpi.edu/Images/CMS/ECE/Midcourse feedback open-ended.docx](http://www.wpi.edu/Images/CMS/ECE/Midcourse%20feedback%20open-ended.docx)

B.5 University of Edinburgh School of Informatics: Mid Semester Questionnaire¹³

Course:		Lecturer:	
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Please use this questionnaire as a constructive way to provide feedback to your lecturer about his/her teaching. Please take a moment and think through your comments to be as specific as possible so that your lecturer can determine what steps to take to make his/her teaching more effective for you. Your answers to this questionnaire should be returned to your lecturer and will be seen only by your lecturer. You will be asked to complete a different survey at the end of the semester that will be used to help guide next year's course.

Do you usually understand what is expected of you in preparing for and participating in this course? If not, please explain why not.		
Yes/ No		

What aspects of this course and your lecturer's teaching help you learn best?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•••

What specific advice would you give to help your lecturer improve your learning in this course?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•••

What steps could you take to improve your own learning in this course?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•••

¹³ These questions have been drawn from the Princeton mid-semester questionnaire:
http://www.princeton.edu/mcgraw/library/for-faculty/midcourseevals/Student_Questionnaire.pdf

B.6 Princeton Midterm Evaluation Questions

B.6.1 Questions of General Applicability:

- I find the format of this class (lecture, discussion, problem-solving) helpful to the way that I learn.
- I feel that this class format engages my interest.
- I feel comfortable speaking in this class.
- I learn better when the instructor summarizes key ideas from a class session.
- I find the comments on exams or other written work helpful to my understanding of the class content.
- I find that this class stimulates my interest in reading about this subject outside of class.
- I feel comfortable approaching the instructor with questions or comments.
- I think that I would learn better if a different format were used for this class (suggested below).

B.6.2 Questions Applicable for Problem-solving or Laboratory Classes:

- The problems worked in this class help me in working other problems on my own.
- The problems worked in this class help me in learning the content ideas in this class.
- I feel that I learn how to solve problems more easily when I work with a group of students.
- I find the laboratory lectures helpful in understanding the purpose of the experiment.
- I find the instructor's comments during laboratory help my understanding of key steps in the experiment.
- I find the comments on my written laboratory reports helpful in understanding the experiment.
- I learn more from the laboratory when I am given questions about it to think about first.
- I learn more from the laboratory when I am given questions about it to write about first.

B.6.3 Questions for Discussion-Oriented Classes:

- I find class discussions help me in understanding the readings.
- I find class discussions help me in understanding key ideas in the course.
- I learn more if class discussions are more structured.
- I feel that class discussions are dominated by one or a few people.
- I learn better when I have more of a chance to speak.
- I learn more from discussions when I am given a question to think about first.
- I learn more from discussions when I am given a question to write about first.

B.6.4 Questions for Classes Using Team or Group Work:

- I feel that I learn more when I work with a group.
- My group works well together
- I feel that I need more guidance for our group work.
- I find that working in a group confuses me.
- I find it helpful if the instructor summarizes results obtained as part of group work.
- I find it helpful to get feedback from my group on my own performance in the group.
- I think that groups work better when each person has an assigned role in the group.

Source: <http://www.princeton.edu/mcgraw/library/for-faculty/midcourseevals/Mid-term-Evaluation-Questions.pdf>

B.7 Stanford University Long Form

1. What percentage of sessions have you attended so far?

- <20% 20-40% 40-60% 60-80% 100%

- | | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 2. Professor LastName is well prepared for the course | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. Presents material clearly | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4. Helps develop students' thinking skills | <input type="radio"/> |

5. Please comment on Professor LastName's knowledge and presentation of course material, focusing first on STRENGTHS and then adding suggestions for IMPROVEMENT:

- | | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 6. Professor LastName provides helpful comments on assignments, papers and exams | <input type="radio"/> |
| 7. Gives explanations appropriate to the student level of understanding | <input type="radio"/> |
| 8. Answers questions clearly and concisely | <input type="radio"/> |

9. Please comment on Professor LastName's effectiveness as a discussion leader, his (her) ability to answer questions and keep the discussion track. Focus first on STRENGTHS and then add suggestions for IMPROVEMENT:

- | | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 10. Professor LastName is available for consultation outside of class | <input type="radio"/> |

11. Please comment of the attitude of Professor LastName toward the students and his (her) availability outside of class. Focus first on STRENGTHS and then add suggestions for IMPROVEMENT:

Source: http://www.stanford.edu/dept/CTL/cgi-bin/images/Evaluation_long_example.pdf