

## Professor Craig Nelson's approach to "Mid-Semester" Evaluations<sup>1</sup>

- Open-ended "mid-semester" evaluations are given after approximately the first third of the semester (this gives you more time to consider and act upon feedback, and can benefit students' assessment of their own study habits before the mid-term exam).
- He asks the students to take out a sheet of paper and respond to these open-ended questions (names are optional--some students want him to know what they are saying or suggesting):
  - (1) What are three important things you have learned so far? [This gets each student to admit that something is important.]
  - (2) What are three aspects of the class that have helped your learning so far?
  - (3) What are three things do you wish were different?
- He tabulates the answers after class using whatever categories emerge. In a large class he sometimes only tabulates the first 75 papers or so and then asks anyone who wants to add something to give him a second note. This rarely happens.
- He then presents the tabulation in class, noting that since students are different, he can't make the course perfect for each of them at every moment and often mentions learning styles. It is often news, for example, to those who don't like discussions, that a substantial majority of students do like them. This tends to reduce dissatisfaction.
- He also re-explains why he is doing any course features that elicited a number of complaints, even though most items were explained on the syllabus and briefly discussed in the first week. This gives him an opportunity to reinforce the course objectives (emphasizing the importance of critical thinking) and to focus on the rationale for learning-centered teaching practices.
- When student suggestions for changes make sense, he announces that he is making those changes during the feedback sessions.
- Students have occasionally commented that they really appreciated the chance to provide feedback while it might change the course they are taking instead of only after the course is over.

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<sup>1</sup> Craig Nelson is Professor Emeritus of Biology, Indiana University-Bloomington. He has contributed extensively to teaching and learning in higher education, and was honored as *Outstanding Research And Doctoral University Professor Of The Year* by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Council for the Advancement and Support of Education in 2000. For more articles on teaching by Craig, see: <http://mypage.iu.edu/~nelson1/>