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Roderick, Carol

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Creating Open-Ended Questions for Student Feedback on Courses Surveys

Starting Fall 2014, you can add two open-ended questions to the Student Feedback on Courses survey for each of your courses. You may want to focus your questions on a new activity or assignment that you have added to your course, an element of the course that students often struggle with, or a particular teaching strategy.

Good feedback practice:

- Craft open-ended questions that encourage a diversity of student responses
- Ensure questions are simple, clear and specific
- Evaluate why you are asking the question: what do you hope to learn from student responses?
- Ask a colleague (or the FCDC) to proof-read your questions
- For background information on Student Feedback on Courses, please click [here](#)

What does good quality feedback practice look like?

| Simple | | |
|--|---|---|
| Description | Poor Example | Stronger Example |
| Avoid overly complicated or elaborately written questions. Use simple English and sentence structure | “Describe three aspects of the course that contributed to your learning (Canvas, field trips and guest speakers notwithstanding)” <i>The question is more complicated than necessary. Revise to make it more specific.</i> | “Describe three aspects of the course that contributed to your learning”; “How did the in-class discussions contribute to your learning?” |
| Open-ended | | |
| Description | Poor Example | Stronger Example |
| Avoid questions that have yes or no answers. | “Did this course help improve your understanding of the topic?” <i>Students will answer yes or no. They are unlikely to elaborate.</i> | “Explain how this course improved your understanding of the topic” |
| Specific | | |
| Description | Poor Example | Stronger Example |
| Rather than ask a broad question, ask about specific topics, assignments or teaching methods. | “What part of the class did you like?”; “If you could make a change in the course, what would it be?” <i>These questions aren’t bad, but the feedback may benefit from directing or guiding student responses</i> | “Describe how the second print-making assignment contributes to your learning”; “How could Canvas be used more effectively to support your learning?” |
| Realistic | | |
| Description | Poor Example | Stronger Example |
| Avoid asking students questions that they do not have knowledge to comment on | “Elaborate on how this course furthers the institutional goals of OCAD U” <i>It is unlikely that students know the institutional goals of the university.</i> | “How did this course built on the knowledge and skills of your previous OCAD U courses?” |

| Ambiguous | | |
|---|---|--|
| Description | Poor Example | Stronger Example |
| Avoid questions or wordings that may have alternative interpretations | “How did this course help you?” <i>Which part of the course? Help in what capacity? This question is far too broad.</i> | “Which reading was the most valuable for your learning and why?” |
| Double-Barrelled | | |
| Description | Poor Example | Stronger Example |
| Avoid questions that contain more than one idea | “Were the readings and assessments appropriate for a second year course?” <i>Question asks about two different components: readings AND assignments.</i> | “How do the readings align to the learning outcomes of the course?”* <i>*Challenge: Students may not know what the learning outcomes are if they have not been explicitly/repeatedly told them.</i> |
| Jargon-Free | | |
| Description | Poor Example | Stronger Example |
| Avoid questions that include jargon that may be misunderstood by students | “How did the classroom-based activities synergize with the content of our Canvas discussions to produce a cohesive learning experience?” <i>“Synergize” and “cohesive” could be challenging to students.</i> | “How do the in-class activities complement the online Canvas discussions?” |
| Universal Quantifier-Free | | |
| Description | Poor Example | Stronger Example |
| Avoid questions that employ quantifiers such as “always”, “never”, “every”... | “Did this class always maintain your interest?” <i>It is difficult to agree with statements that ask such a firm delineation</i> | “Which topic interested you most and why?” <i>*Challenge: do students need to be interested in the subject? What is the intent of this question?</i> |
| Connotation/Emotion Free | | |
| Description | Poor Example | Stronger Example |
| Avoid questions that include words with strong (emotional) connotations | “Did you love the field trip to the AGO?”; “Which assignment traumatized you the most?” <i>Students may not have strong emotions, or may feel uncomfortable by the word choice of these examples</i> | “How did the field trip to the AGO contribute to your learning?”; “Which assignment challenged you the most and why?” |
| Negative (and Double Negative) Free | | |
| Description | Poor Example | Stronger Example |
| Avoid questions that include negatives and double-negatives. These questions are easily misinterpreted and can produce false results. | “Were you ever not challenged by the subject we were discussing?” <i>These questions are grammatically and logistically difficult to interpret.</i> | “Which topic was the most challenging for you to learn and why?” |
| Leading | | |
| Description | Poor Example | Stronger Example |
| Avoid questions that cue the students to give a particular | “How would you describe the excellent teaching of this award winning | “Discuss the faculty member’s teaching strengths”; “How can |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| ("right") answer | artist/faculty member?" <i>There are several leading words: "excellent" and "award winning" suggests students should praise this faculty member</i> | the faculty member increase student engagement?" |
| Future Oriented | | |
| Description | Poor Example | Stronger Example |
| Avoid questions that require students to speculate about future events | "How does this course prepare you for a career post-graduation?" <i>Students cannot know what they require for future courses or careers with any certainty</i> | "What skills and knowledge did you learn in this course?" |

References

- Borgatti, Stephen P. (1996). [Principles of Questionnaire Construction](#). Access Oct 23, 2014
- Kwan, Kam-Por (1999). Developing a feedback questionnaire: Principles and steps. Accessed Oct 22, 2014