

Midterm reflective course evaluations: a tool for online course improvement

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Abstract

This article explores the use of midterm reflective course evaluations in making timely adjustments to online courses. Over six semesters, the researchers implemented midterm reflective course evaluations into their online courses. Using the Fearless Teaching Framework, the researchers analyzed feedback from 438 students related to classroom climate, course content, teaching practices and assessment. Findings suggested that midterm reflective course evaluations lead to responsive teaching practices during the term. Discussion of the implementation of midterm reflective course evaluations and their role in a continuous improvement process informs others considering using this strategy.

Paper type Research paper



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Despite the entrenchment of traditional student course evaluations as a widely studied topic, definitive answers about how to best conduct them and utilize the information obtained to support student learning and instructional improvements remain elusive. While Likert scale surveys provide the most common student course evaluation format (Borch, Sandvoll, & Risør, 2020; Grebennikov & Shah, 2013; Harper & Kuh, 2007; Kember, Leung, & Kwan, 2002; Steyn, Davies, & Sambo, 2019), those yield little, if any, evidence regarding how to improve teaching practices (Borch, 2020; Kember *et al.*, 2002). Shortfalls of the traditional survey include the following: few students complete the survey (Ogden & Ogden, 2018), surveys tend to reflect a teacher-centered versus student-centered perspective (Barth, 2008; Edström, 2008; Golding & Adam, 2016; Steyn *et al.*, 2019; Youssef, 2012) and minimal improvement to the experience for students results from the process (Davies, Hirschberg, Lye,



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Johnston, & McDonald, 2005). Age (Zabaleta, 2007), cultural and gender biases have also been found (Alderman, Towers, & Bannah, 2012; Olivares, 2003), including the finding that when students evaluated an instructor perceived as female, lower evaluation ratings resulted as compared to when students perceived the same instructor as male (Boring, Ottoboni, & Stark, 2016). Additionally, external factors such as class size, class type, whether the class is required and even ratings of other instructors influence the results of traditional course evaluations (Davies *et al.*, 2005). Such pervasive issues with course evaluations contribute to calls for discontinuing their use as a component in personnel decisions (Boring *et al.*, 2016; Zabaleta, 2007).

The combination of concerns with the traditional course evaluation process and low student evaluation response rates in online courses led the researchers to seek a complementary method to obtain feedback helpful in making meaningful course changes. They implemented reflective student course evaluations at the term's end, which produced rich information to consider (Risacher & Fier, 2023). Based on reflective questions that focus on the student experience, the reflective course evaluation provides an alternative to traditional Likert scale course evaluations. Reflective questions intentionally designed to elicit student reflective feedback and subsequent instructor reflection provide impactful feedback for improving teaching strategies (Åkerlind, 2007; Borch, 2020; Myers, Myers, Stewart, & Nynas, 2015).

The reflective evaluation process incorporates a deeper understanding of and engagement with the content than what occurs with traditional course evaluations. Open-ended questions inquiring about aspects of the course and related to student effort and activities during the course provide a wealth of information compared to Likert survey course evaluations (Klimova, 2014; Lewis, 2001a; Minott & Young, 2009). Reflective evaluations enable the instructor to develop increased self-awareness of their teaching and promote deeper content engagement. During the reflective course evaluation process, students engage in the initial reflection. Then, the instructor reflects on the results to identify course and teaching strategy strengths and opportunities for improvement. A cycle of continuous improvement occurs through student reflection, information sharing, instructor reflection and implementation of changes, providing a cyclical process between instructor and student with reflection as the tool (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Picardo & Sabourin, 2018; Youssef, 2012). In addition, reflective evaluations provide insight into student perceptions of their circumstances related to a course (Erikson, Erikson, & Punzi, 2016).

The present study builds on the researchers' previous work, which found end-of-term reflective course evaluations helpful for gathering student feedback and making meaningful course changes (Risacher & Fier, 2023). In the present study, the researchers sought to address the research question: Does the use of midterm reflective evaluations lead to meaningful online course change during the term? The researchers implemented a reflective course evaluation at midterm, hoping to provide an opportunity during the course to respond to student concerns as opposed to learning about the concerns at the end of the term. The midterm reflective evaluation also allowed students to consider their approach to the course, with adequate time remaining in the term to make adjustments to their learning strategies. The researchers hope to help address the limited research on reflective midterm course evaluations.

Literature review

With typical course evaluation administration occurring at the end of each academic term, by design, future course offerings present the first opportunity to implement changes resulting from course evaluations. The literature provides evidence of attempts to address this concern by administering course evaluations at the midpoint of the term (Pastore, Manuti, Scardigno, Curci, & Pentassuglia, 2019).

Utilization of course midterm feedback dates to at least the 1970's (Friedlander, 1978; Miller, 1971), and a review of the literature yields ample evidence that midterm evaluation feedback positively impacts end-of-term course evaluation results (Boysen, 2016). Midterm

evaluation primarily falls into variations of three types: Likert scale rating-based evaluations, the use of a limited number of open-ended questions and evaluations using small group instructional diagnosis (SGID).

Likert scale rating-based evaluations

Since Likert scale evaluations comprise the most used end-of-term course evaluations, not surprisingly, their presence also appears in the midterm course evaluation literature. Early research by Pambookian (1974) and Overall and Marsh (1979) found that midterm Likert scale course evaluations correlated positively with end-of-term Likert scale evaluation results when discussion of the midterm evaluation results occurred. Additionally, classes using midterm course evaluation achieved better end-of-term ratings on instructor and course variables (Porcano, 2011).

More recent research found that faculty briefing sessions conducted with students about midterm course evaluation feedback positively correlated with end-of-term improvements in evaluation results. The improvements increased with additional engagement with the process: administering the midterm evaluation, holding a debriefing session and making course changes (Ransom McGowan & Osguthorpe, 2011).

Open-ended question surveys

The benefits of midterm course evaluation extend beyond the numerical ratings of Likert scale surveys. Open-ended questions facilitate course adjustments for future course offerings (Harris & Stevens, 2013). Furthermore, using open-ended questions results in identifying many additional course concerns not identified when using only closed-ended questions (Huxham *et al.*, 2008). Thus, open-ended questions allowed students to express, and in turn, faculty to address specific as well as more general concerns, including student points of confusion and class details in need of clarification (Parkin & Henderson, 2014). Students notice course changes made at midterm in response to feedback from open-ended questions (Friedlander, 1978), and the results of midterm changes contribute to improved student feedback in the future (Pardo, Est'vez-Ayres, Bastanta-Val, & Fuentes-Lorenzo, 2010).

Instructor sharing of midterm feedback with students contributes to a perceived increase in student empathy for the instructor (Keutzer, 1993), instructor perception of enhanced instructor and student relationships (Hunt, 2003), and more favorable student opinions toward student evaluations of teaching in general (Brown, 2008). As with any course evaluation process, its impact relates to the effectiveness with which the instructor receives the feedback and implements resulting course adaptations. Additionally, midterm course evaluations hold the most utility when explicitly designed for midterm use instead of simply administering the same evaluation at midterm and the end of the term (Davis Bullock, 2003).

Small group instructional diagnosis (SGID)

Developed in 1974 and increasingly popular as a midterm course evaluation format, SGID provided the opportunity to elicit more information than feasibly obtained from a traditional Likert scale survey (Diamond, 2004). SGID begins with the identification of an evaluation facilitator. The facilitator and students then meet. Anonymous feedback is gathered, with students sometimes prompted to "...write down three things they like, dislike and suggestions for improvement" (Holt & Moore, 1992, p. 48). The facilitator shares the feedback with the instructor. The instructor then talks with the students about the feedback. The instructor and facilitator meet again for further discussion (Holt & Moore, 1992; Redmond, 1982). Results indicate improved instructor and student motivation related to the class (Redmond, 1982).

Other terms appear in the literature for midterm course evaluation processes very similar to SGID, including course refinement (Taylor, Knorr, Ogrodnik, & Sinclair, 2020) and for online courses, eFACT (Berridge, Penney, & Wells, 2012) and eSGID (O'Neal-Hixson, Long, &

Bock, 2017). A variant of SGID, Bare Bones Questions (BBQ), enlists a faculty colleague's aid in the facilitator role. Using the BBQ leads to improved student satisfaction and opinions of instructors (Snooks, Neely, & Revere, 2007).

SGID variations emphasize the shared responsibility of course success. Hurney, Harris, Bates Prins, and Kruck (2014) added a student self-reflection component to SGID and compared results to a group without the self-reflection component. The students who engaged in self-reflection indicated enhanced passion for the course, better preparedness and improved understanding of course requirements. Another SGID variation utilizes student consultants as feedback collectors (Cook-Sather, 2009).

More recent studies provide continued consideration of the impact of SGID in collecting midterm feedback. Veeck, O'Reilly, MacMillan, and Yu (2016) used an online collaborative process to solicit student midterm evaluation perspectives, hoping to maintain the group collaboration element of SGID without the significant time and resource commitment. They found that breaking students into groups of six to eight and providing significant instruction facilitated productive feedback. Donlan and Byrne (2020) psychometrically validated an instrument for midterm assessment with a focus on identifying how classes support and impede learning and further refined the instrument for use in online courses (Byrne & Donlan, 2020).

Value resides in SGID's comprehensive nature, contributing to its persistence as a valuable midterm course assessment format. Engagement in the process elicits student appreciation for the instructor's passion for the course and willingness to assess students. Students also benefit from the opportunity to reflect (Murat Sozer, Zeybekoglu, & Kaya, 2019).

Within today's higher education landscape, regardless of the format course evaluation takes, a continuous improvement process remains an important goal. SGID, as a peer review tool, provides one example (Blash, Schneller, Hunt, Michaels, & Thorndike, 2018). Muhayimana's (2023) use of reflective questions in midterm evaluations, focused on the self-mentoring aspect of continuous improvement, provides another example.

In summary, the literature demonstrates the value of the midterm course evaluation for positively impacting teaching and learning. Midterm course evaluation variations dating back at least half a century incorporate traditional Likert scale surveys, open-ended questions and SGID methods. While SGID emerges as a process with much supporting evidence, implementation challenges exist. Large universities often have instructional design staff dedicated to course evaluation tasks, including the SGID consultant role. Other institutions leave course evaluation to the individual instructor. Challenges with SGID implementation also exist in online courses and in situations where instructors wish to implement a midterm course evaluation process without enlisting assistance from others. The researchers sought to build on the existing midterm course evaluation literature and their reflective course evaluation work within this context. The midterm course evaluation literature emphasizes the importance of reflective practice in course evaluation (Hurney *et al.*, 2014; Muhayimana, 2023; Murat Sozer *et al.*, 2019), which the current study embraces.

Purpose of the study

A review of the literature indicates the effectiveness of midterm course evaluation in making course enhancements in the middle of the term. Hoping to expand upon their use of reflective evaluations at the end of the term, the researchers investigated their research question: Does the use of midterm reflective evaluations lead to meaningful online course change during the term? The potential exists for the current study to contribute to the body of midterm course evaluation literature, online course evaluation literature and literature addressing limitations of the use of traditional Likert scale course evaluations at the end of the term. The latter goal is grounded in using the reflective midterm evaluation as a component of a continuous improvement process alongside the researchers' use of reflective course evaluations and traditional Likert scale course evaluations at the end of the term. In addition, support for the

potential establishment of reflective midterm course evaluations as an evidence-based option for making midterm course improvements will benefit from additional study.

During pilot study research conducted in an online course during spring term 2022, students completed a reflective course evaluation at midterm and again at the end of the term. The midterm reflections provided an opportunity to check in with students about their approach to the course, their perception of progress toward attaining learning outcomes, and student feedback and suggestions about the content, format and materials (Fier & Risacher, 2022).

The encouraging results of the pilot study led to the researchers' implementation of midterm and final reflective course evaluations in all their courses to investigate the research question further: Does the use of midterm reflective evaluations lead to meaningful online course change during the term? The current manuscript discusses the results of six terms of implementation of midterm reflective course evaluations and the midterm course changes that resulted.

Method

Participants

In total, 438 undergraduate students participated in this study, which took place at a small, rural, public Midwestern university and a small, urban private university. Education majors enrolled in required courses comprised 280 of the participants. Students enrolled in required or elective psychology courses (depending on the major of the students) comprised the remaining 158 students. Course sections represented in this study include 10 sections of five education online courses and 11 sections of six psychology online courses. A signed Institutional Review Board approved consent form provided student consent for study participation. Thirty-five students declined study participation.

Instrument

The researchers used their end-of-term reflective course evaluations as the starting point to develop similar midterm reflective course evaluations. The instruments included open-ended reflective questions to which students provided written responses. The questions encouraged students to reflect on their course learning approach and identify things going well in the course and desired changes for the second half of the term. They focused on instructional strategies, course content and suggestions for improvement.

Results

The researchers considered the results of their midterm reflective course evaluations from the perspective of the Fearless Teaching Framework (Donlan, Loughlin, & Byrne, 2019). The Fearless Teaching Framework summarizes four areas within the instructor's control that demonstrate their effectiveness as educators, and in turn, foster conditions that facilitate student motivation. Those four areas include "...classroom climate, course content, teaching practice, and assessment strategies. . ." (Donlan *et al.*, 2019, para. 4), which the authors define as follows. "Classroom climate encompasses the social, emotional, and physical environment of the learning space" (Donlan *et al.*, 2019, para. 12). "Course content refers to the topics, skills, materials, and organization thereof of that an instructor includes in the class" (Donlan *et al.*, 2019, para. 14). "Teaching practices-the activities that instructors engage to design their courses and lessons. . ." (Donlan *et al.*, 2019, para. 17). "Assessment practice (e.g., projects, tests, and assignments). . ." (Donlan *et al.*, 2019, para. 23). Utilizing the Fearless Teaching Framework resulted in identification of course factors going well as well as opportunities for change during the second half of the term and longer-term. Results within the scope of this manuscript include opportunities for change addressed by the researchers during the second half of the term. In Table 1, actions taken during the second half of the class follow the

Table 1. Midterm changes based on Donlan *et al.* (2019) Fearless Teaching Framework

Fearless Teaching Framework component	Course/term	Student comment	Course change
Climate: "... social, emotional, and physical environment of a learning space" (Donlan <i>et al.</i> , 2019, para. 4)	ED42311/Spring 2023	"I am really enjoying the flexibility of this course, especially the flexibility of working ahead of time on discussion posts and assignments."	Reviewed courses to ensure material is available to allow flexibility
	PSY1001/Fall 2022	"More videos could be essential to our learning for those who are visual learners. For example, a quick video lecture of the different areas being covered this week and what is expected of us for the assignment. If an article assignment is assigned, perhaps make a video instructing us where to go find an article, going down each criteria of what is expected. Etc."	Incorporation of weekly "walkthrough" videos discussed weekly expectations and videos for larger assignments provided additional information for students
	PSYC301/Spring 2022	"I really like the structure of this class, the only thing that's really different is having assignments due at 10:00 pm at night to oppose to the more prominent 11:59 pm..."	The instructor wanted students to focus on assignment quality more than the due date, so a 48-h grace period for assignment submissions was instituted
	PSYC301/Spring 2022	"I find the discussion topics to be very beneficial. I like being able to read what fellow classmates have to say. This helps me connect concepts outside of just the book. The only thing that I find kind of different about the discussion topics is that my role is very different from my classmates. I sometimes wonder if my classes mates are learning from me like I am them. As someone with a sport background I can understand them. But I'm not always sure they understand my role. Due to this I do not get many replies on my feeds. Which can be frustrating because I am not sure if I am making an impact to the class environment."	The instructor asked students to try to respond to classmates without responses

(continued)

Table 1. Continued

Fearless Teaching Framework component	Course/term	Student comment	Course change
Content: "... topics, skills, materials, and organization thereof of that an instructor includes in the class" (Donlan <i>et al.</i> , 2019, para. 14)	All education and psychology classes, all terms, all sections in the study	Desire to meet synchronously via Zoom	Implemented synchronous meeting times
	ED25111/Spring 2023	"...great resources I can use for if a student is ever getting bullied and potentially, I could use this lesson plan in real life. Things that stand out from these assignments is that they have all been useful for my future."	Focus on finding current up to date resources during the second half of the term
	ED33111/Fall 2022	"I would have liked to have due dates Sundays at midnight to give quality work without rushing."	Changed due dates to Sundays at 11:59 pm
	ED33111/Fall 2022	"Something I would like to add to this class would be a parent permission form for our class to document our running records."	Created permission form
	ED42311/Spring 2023	"For this course specifically, I really enjoyed that the assignments were spread out with a good distance in between."	The instructor completed additional checks of assessment due dates as means of facilitating schedules and encouraging student engagement in the content
	PSY1001/Fall 2022	"Something that could be different to help me learn about these would maybe be to add a video explanation on all of those because some people, like myself, learn better by hearing someone talking about concepts."	The instructor added more concept videos
	PSY3100/Fall 2023	"Perhaps it would be interesting once or twice to understand a diagnosis from a truly different perspective—like the idea behind possession versus dissociative identity disorder."	The instructor incorporated culture-specific mental health concerns into the course

(continued)

Table 1. Continued

Fearless Teaching Framework component	Course/term	Student comment	Course change
	PSYC301/Spring 2022	“These assignments [discussion assignments] are not my favorite, but they can be helpful to see the different psychological concepts through other individuals’ eyes. However, one of the reasons that I do not like these assignments is that they are often due on a Tuesday. This would not be a problem if the material were to be opened sooner, instead of only being given 24 h to complete the assignment.”	Addressing this student misperception involved informing this student individually and all students through announcements that new assignment availability occurred on Friday for assignments due the following week
	PSYC301/Spring 2023	“I think that when responding to the discussions, it could be different to not only apply them to the role but have the option or do both to apply some of the concepts to our lives right now.”	The instructor informed the student that this option existed. Several similar examples indicated students needed prompting to find resources currently available in the class
Practice: “...activities that instructors engage to design their courses and lessons...” (Donlan <i>et al.</i> , 2019, para. 17)	ED42311/Spring 2023	“I have already started to use this information professionally every day.”	Added practical assignments and an interview component as students worked on classroom management strategies
	PSY1001/Fall 2022	“...the invitation each week to use a different medium to express your learning shows that other ways of knowing are valuable to the class. I think having more examples of these different ways, or proactively encouraging students to try one or two over the course of the semester would be a way to both normalize other ways of knowing and learning and also decentralize the ‘default’ mode/pattern that students get into due to all the other classes that prioritize that pattern.”	During the second half of the semester, students were asked to submit an assignment in a format other than writing (video, audio, PowerPoint, etc.). The student who made the comment submitted their assignment in writing anyway
	PSY3300/Winter 2023	“I feel like the CAs [concept assignments] could be enhanced by adding more personal reflection.”	This addition occurred for the second half of the semester

(continued)

Table 1. Continued

Fearless Teaching Framework component	Course/term	Student comment	Course change
Assessment: "...projects, tests, and assignments. ..." (Donlan <i>et al.</i> , 2019, para. 23)	PSY3000/Summer 2023	"I don't mind the assignments, the only thing that frustrates me about them is having to write "at least" so many sentences. For me, whether I write it in a few sentences, or pages, it doesn't really matter to me."	Intended to serve as a plagiarism deterrent, revision of this prompt to "in your own words" occurred
	ED42311/Spring 2023	"I am a virtual learner so I like to have examples which could be an idea for each assignment. In one of my classes my professor provided a student's previous work which I found useful"	Provided more student work examples
	PSY1001/Fall 2023	"I truly wouldn't change anything about these assignments but if I did, it would be just having more examples of what is looking for."	The addition of more assignment examples occurred for the second half of the semester
	PSYC301/Spring 2023	"I also think that allowing students to develop their own concept assignment through their own questions a couple of times during the semester will also help us reflect what we learned and allow students to analyze information deeper."	The instructor provided this opportunity, but no students took advantage of it

Discussion

This study considered midterm reflective student course evaluations as a tool for facilitating online course adaptations during the term. Based on the results of this study, the researchers found that midterm reflective course evaluations provide a valuable complement to their use of reflective course evaluations and traditional Likert scale evaluations at the end of the term and an essential component in their continuous improvement process focused on providing the best learning environment possible for students. Engagement in the midterm reflective evaluation process also encourages instructors to approach the process using a data-informed perspective (Payette & Kendall Brown, 2018).

One outcome of the midterm reflective course evaluation included information about student misunderstandings and inaccurate assumptions related to the course, to which the instructors responded. For example, some psychology assignments asked students to choose a personal or professional role (for example, as a student or in their future professional role as an athletic trainer or social worker). One student expressed frustration that they chose a role that made it hard to complete some of the assignments. Learning this, the instructor suggested that students choose a relevant role most applicable to each assignment rather than using the same role for all assignments. Another student expressed frustration about the short time between online assignment availability and the due date. The student thought assignment availability began on Monday, but it started on Friday. The midterm reflective course evaluation provided the opportunity to correct this misperception.

As universities focus on student retention, Dicker, Garcia, Kelly and Mulrooney (2019) indicated that students appreciate the connections and long-term relationships with competent faculty. Dicker *et al.* (2017) shared that students want faculty contact time. This study yielded similar findings, with frequent student responses requesting synchronous meetings. Very limited (if any) student participation occurred when the researchers offered such opportunities in response to student requests. Dicker *et al.* (2017) defined contact time broadly and not limited to face-to-face interaction. Throughout the six terms of the midterm reflective course evaluation research, the researchers found other ways to connect with students, such as a getting-to-know-you-survey in the first week of class, videos showing themselves on camera, synchronous office hours, and weekly walkthrough videos. The researchers also found that providing descriptions of course delivery for hybrid ("...combines the online learning and on-campus learning experiences. Hybrid programs utilize classroom environments and online technology." [Southwest Minnesota State University, 2022]) and online ("Online courses are offered as 'Completely Online-Asynchronous'" [Southwest Minnesota State University, 2024]) formats helped students better understand and accept the interactions with faculty based on course delivery modes. Students still express a desire for synchronous meetings but make this comment less frequently than before the sharing of course modality definitions.

As part of a continuous improvement cycle, the midterm reflective evaluation provides formative feedback for the instructor (Donlan & Byrne, 2020). Results only available to the instructor allow for careful consideration of input without fear of adverse outcomes related to promotion or tenure, addressing a concern noted in the literature (Keutzer, 1993). The researchers value this facet of the midterm reflective course evaluation process.

Regarding the Fearless Teaching Framework, the authors stated, "A potential avenue for future work is exploring how measures of climate, content, practice, and assessment can be used to evaluate teaching, both in formative and summative assessment" (Donlan *et al.*, 2019, para. 30). Utilized within a cycle of continuous improvement, course adjustments enacted because of the formative feedback received from the midterm reflective evaluation serve to build toward a summative faculty evaluation process. The potential exists for the adjustments instructors make in response to results of the midterm reflective course evaluation to serve as

evidence of how the instructors enhanced the four areas of the Fearless Teaching Framework, "...classroom climate, course content, teaching practice, and assessment strategies..." (Donlan *et al.*, 2019, para. 4), in response to student feedback.

Instructors receiving recognition as good instructors engage in reflection about their work (Golding & Adam, 2016). The midterm reflective course evaluation provides a reflective opportunity for the researchers and an opportunity to discuss their research with one another and other colleagues with whom they share. As such, it provides a vital component of the continuous improvement cycle with which they approach their courses.

Limitations

Despite the usefulness the researchers found in the midterm reflective course evaluation process, limitations exist. As an assignment embedded within the classes they teach, the non-anonymous nature of the midterm reflective course evaluation potentially impacts the information shared by students. The researchers aim to limit the impact of this variable by informing students that their grade depends on reflective evaluation completion as opposed to the nature of their specific feedback. In addition, the instructors experience students frequently requesting extra credit or bonus assignments. The midterm reflective evaluation provides a productive use of assignment. Students receive full credit for doing the assignment, resulting in valuable feedback for the instructor and the course.

The instructors use the midterm reflective course evaluation as one component of a continuous improvement cycle, so students have anonymous opportunities to provide input in addition to the non-anonymous reflective course evaluation. Furthermore, the researchers provided the option for students to not participate in the study, with 35 (6%) students choosing that option. The researchers noted no midterm changes resulting solely from the nonconsenting students' feedback.

Due to the nature of the midterm reflective course evaluation as an assignment, the researchers occasionally perceive student responses as written because students thought they needed to identify something to change in the course, for example, stating that there should be more of something already prevalent. Furthermore, with the advent of artificial intelligence tools, the researchers notice student responses reflective of responses generated by artificial intelligence. Such cases lead to difficulty in knowing students' actual perceptions and desire for course changes, with the potential for instructors to make changes not actually reflective of students' perceptions.

The researchers noted that students may find it onerous and repetitive if the use of midterm reflective course evaluation becomes widespread. The researchers also wonder about the possibility of diminished feedback value if using the tool every semester for the same course. Periodic rather than use every semester provides one option. In addition, Lewis (2001b) recommended shortening evaluations to avoid student overload when completing multiple surveys.

Despite the limitations of requiring students to complete reflective evaluations as assignments, awarding credit for their completion potentially decreases the perceived burden. (Ransom McGowan & Osguthorpe, 2011). Explaining the importance of their feedback as an essential component of course improvement facilitates student willingness to participate in the midterm reflective evaluation process (Vargas-Madriz & Nocente, 2023). With notable relevance for the education students participating in this study, evaluation completion also deepens learning and prepares students for future evaluation opportunities for serving the party undergoing evaluation. Timely response to feedback and change implementation by the instructor further enhance student perception of value in the midterm reflective evaluation process (Lewis, 2001a).

Directions for future research

The researchers' investigation of the midterm reflective course evaluation includes psychology and education courses. Recruitment of colleagues from other disciplines would allow for exploration of the utility of the tool for other academic areas.

Lewis (2001b) recommended getting frequent student feedback as early as week three and also recommended the start, stop and continue student feedback format which asks students to provide two suggestions in each of those areas. To further enhance their continuous improvement cycle, the researchers plan to implement a short anonymous student feedback survey during the third week of class, using a model such as start, stop, and continue. This will provide an opportunity to quickly assess things going well in the class and things to change and to respond to student questions. Assessment instruments included in the researchers' cycle of continuous improvement will then include the week-three anonymous feedback survey, the midterm reflective course evaluation, the end-of-term reflective course evaluation and the end-of-term anonymous Likert scale course evaluation.

An additional area of consideration for future research includes the exploration of what students really desire in their courses and learning experiences. The authors found instances during the midterm and end-of-term evaluations where students indicated a desire for change or improvement. When implemented, students sometimes failed to perceive the value of or take advantage of the change. Some examples include the desire for more face-to-face time in asynchronous online classes, additional weekly check-ins and less course rigor to accommodate student work-life balance. These findings indicate that additional questions remain regarding what students truly want and how to serve those needs while maintaining course integrity.

Conclusion

Midterm reflective course evaluations serve as a tool for midterm course adaptations. The evaluations encourage students to reflect on their own learning responsibility and to provide more thoughtful and nuanced feedback to the instructor than students typically share in a Likert scale survey. The reflective process helps students articulate their understanding of their learning thus far in the course, identify areas where they need additional support and offer suggestions for instructional improvements.

The midterm reflective course evaluation centers the students' perspectives and empowers them to contribute meaningfully to the course adaptation process. Dicker *et al.* (2017) discovered that students often see themselves as consumers in the teaching and learning experience rather than as active participants. This perception reduces the degree of course engagement and motivation as they view themselves as passive participants. The midterm reflective evaluation serves as a tool in overcoming this perception by engaging students as active agents in course development as they provide feedback during the midterm reflective course evaluation, which results in a change or improvement to the course.

Midterm reflective course evaluations provide instructors with timely insights into the effectiveness of their teaching methods and allow for adjustments with the course still in progress. Such agility facilitates more responsive and student-centered teaching practices than feedback obtained through end-of-term course evaluations, which only impact future course offerings. By prioritizing the student experience and engaging them in the reflective process, instructors gain valuable insight, leading to informed course adaptations and benefiting students and the overall learning environment.

The midterm reflective evaluation models a growth mindset as students witness instructors' openness to input and implementation of changes. The potential exists to enhance students' ability to utilize the same openness to feedback with the recognition that everyone benefits from a perspective of openness to growth, learning and improvement. The researchers hope others view midterm reflective student course evaluations as an approachable option for gathering midterm course feedback.

The researchers' experience throughout six terms of implementing midterm reflective course evaluations provided an affirmative response to their research question: Does the use of midterm reflective evaluations lead to meaningful online course change during the term? Midterm reflective evaluations provided breadth and depth of information that allowed for immediate course adaptations, enhancing the course experience for current students instead of deferring improvements until future course offerings when using end-of-term course evaluations in isolation. Midterm reflective course evaluations facilitated a more comprehensive understanding of student perspectives of the course learning environment and proved helpful in gathering midterm feedback in online courses. Midterm reflective course evaluations provide a valuable tool in the researchers' continuous improvement process, and they hope their research will encourage other educators to try reflective course evaluations in their courses.

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