

News from the [Teaching & Learning Lab](#) at HGSE

[View in browser](#)

[Forward to a colleague](#)

[Sign up to receive this newsletter](#)

Spring 2017, Issue 1  
**LEARNING LOOP**  
A Teaching and Learning Lab Newsletter

## Welcome

Research shows that frequent feedback improves learning. This finding is as applicable to our teaching as it is for students' learning. Getting feedback early and often from our students can help us make sure that we are creating powerful learning environments that are meeting their particular needs and interests, while also helping create a classroom community where everyone feels empowered and invested. There is no one way to gather and apply student feedback to course improvements, and HGSE faculty employ many different techniques to learn from their students. Read below about the approaches of three faculty members and how the TLL can help HGSE faculty incorporate frequent feedback loops into their teaching.



### Case studies in formative feedback at HGSE

Committing to the use of student feedback is one thing; creating effective methods for doing so is another. To help you in this work, this article highlights the diverse and

impactful practices of three HGSE instructors on gathering student feedback. We asked each of these instructors to give us a sense of what the technique is, why they use it, and how they do so.

## Mid-course feedback: a chance to take stock and course correct | Jon Star

### What is it?

It is relatively common for faculty to gather mid-course feedback, giving students a chance to share their perspective on how the elements of the class are impacting their learning experience. There are many ways to solicit this feedback, and Jon's current method involves priming students with some things he would like to learn about in particular and then posing just a few open-ended prompts to allow students to share whatever is most important to them. Jon then decides if and how to modify the course accordingly.

### Why do it?

"I teach a course on learning and motivation. I'm someone who is supposed to know something about these topics, and I try to reflect that knowledge in how I design my classes. I know giving students some choice and perceived control over aspects of the course is motivating. And gathering feedback consistently through the course, not just at the end, is a key way in which I make this happen," reflects Jon. He finds great value in creating a space in the middle of the course experience to have students think broadly about what is and is not working for them. This feedback allows Jon to modify various course components to best meet the needs of these particular students while also building a sense of shared ownership.

## Reading response briefs: integrating student feedback into class session design | Candice Bocala

### What is it?

Students complete and submit short written assignments called "reading briefs" in advance of class. The teaching team reviews the briefs to identify common patterns and to decide how to incorporate students' insights and questions about the reading into designing the class session. The teaching team also gives individual feedback on the briefs.

### Why do it?

"This tool gives me much better information about where students are confused, rather than relying only on the information I get from what students say in class or during office hours. Because it is in writing, I can address any misconceptions right away on their brief, and I can also address it in the whole class when useful." Candice also uses the briefs as a way to help select the topics of discussion that best meet students where they are

at. She often invites students to share their responses and questions during the class, thus diversifying participation and sharing discussion leadership.

## Pluses and deltas: gathering student perspectives after a given class session | Kathy Boudett

### What is it?

“Pluses and deltas” is a simple and versatile vehicle for gathering student feedback at any time, often at the end of a class session. The key elements are soliciting student perspectives on what has gone well (pluses) and where there might be room for improvement (deltas, which comes from the Greek symbol for change) and then exploring how this information might be used to improve the course experience. Critical to making this practice work is dedicating time in class to share an overview of their suggestions and the resulting responses.

### Why do it?

“I really want to teach amazing classes, and a key part of doing so is to gather formative feedback on an on-going basis to make sure I am meeting the needs of these particular students,” says Kathy. She finds that students give immensely helpful feedback and that, in doing so, they become more invested in the course and the classroom community. Her own research is focused on the power of continuous improvement, and this pluses and deltas technique is an effective way to apply that principle to her own practice.

To read about how they do it, [continue on to our blog post](#).



## Three Ways the TLL Can Help You Harness Student

# Feedback

## End-of-course feedback consultations

At HGSE, we are fortunate to have robust end-of-semester feedback that comes from near 100% completion of a survey that has 29 Likert-scale questions and 7 open-ended responses. The flip side of this rich data is that it can be almost too much to take in. Both research and our own experience show that there are significant benefits in thinking through student evaluation data with a trained instructional consultant. Doing so can help you keep the outlier comments in context and brainstorm how it all can be of use in terms of improving your instruction and course content.

## Mid-course feedback through Small Group Feedback Sessions

Small Group Feedback Sessions (SGFSs) are a powerful tool for taking the pulse of your classroom community midstream. In an SFGS, you would work with a TLL consultant to determine three to five key questions about the course experience. The consultant then comes in for twenty minutes at the end of one of your classes and, with you and your teaching team out of the room, facilitates a conversation in both small groups and as a whole class. This process allows the class a confidential space to collectively explore their experiences as learners and helps the consultant to gather targeted and nuanced feedback. The consultant creates a report and meets with you to discuss patterns and potential implications.

## Helping you craft an overall plan for harnessing student feedback

In addition to working with you to acquire feedback at a particular moment in time, we are excited to help you come up with a coherent plan for harnessing student perspectives throughout the course. We can help you find [lightweight feedback mechanisms such as these](#), we can help you customize our [qualitative](#) and [quantitative](#) mid-course feedback survey templates, and we can workshop and refine mechanisms you already have in place.

## Resources and Opportunities

We encourage you to reach out to the TLL for support with analyzing student evaluations, receiving formative feedback, and making course enhancements. [Contact Josh Bookin](#), Manager of Instructional Support, for more information.

---

