



# HARVARD

Office of the Vice Provost for Advances in Learning

## Creating a Culture of Feedback in an Online Course: Takeaways

January 14, 2021

This session explored opportunities and challenges in fostering a culture of frequent student feedback in online courses. It showcased strategies used by Prof. Liz City (HGSE) and Prof. Todd Rogers (HKS) to successfully elicit feedback in online courses and utilize it to inform real-time changes in their teaching practices.

*How to foster a safe environment and encourage honest feedback:*

- Invite students to **introduce themselves** and have their bios/photos at hand throughout the course. Share something personal about yourself. **Humor** and **vulnerability** go a long way!
- Feedback should be a **two-way street**. Model giving and receiving feedback with grace. Encourage students to **view feedback as a gift**, not criticism, and respond by saying 'thank you'.
- Instructors can empower **TA/TF/CA's** to elicit feedback from students, distill it, and communicate it to the instructor.

*Practical approaches to eliciting feedback:*

- Ask students to share **Plus/Delta** (strengths/opportunities for improvement) via chat or Google doc; reflect on it after class; share back to class the following day, indicating what changes you are making in response.
- **First of Five** is a quick real-time feedback method, showing your thumb means bad, showing all 5 fingers is the top rating.
- **Ask the same question after every class session**: "How effective was today's class for your learning"?
- Give a **1-minute survey** at end of class - what they learned, what they struggled with, mechanics of class; giving them the opportunity to reflect in the last few minutes - provides feedback but also cements their learning.

*How to make feedback actionable:*

- Give space for learners to provide **open-ended feedback** where they can address issues you may not have anticipated and provide concrete examples.
- Acknowledge feedback even if you don't plan to act on it. Not all feedback needs to be actionable - **sometimes people just need to be heard**.
- To help you guard against over-reacting to feedback and/or put unconstructive feedback in context, **consider having a TA or a teaching & learning person read, synthesize, and prioritize the feedback for you**, both positive and negative.
- We talked a lot about how to handle it when we get **conflicting feedback**. How do we share it with the class? One instructor uses a word chart to represent the feedback and shares it with the class.
- Consider cases in which it might be appropriate to give feedback that is **not anonymous**. It's a skill to provide direct feedback in a way that the recipient can hear and act on it, and we can all use practice in that area.