Teaching toolkits

Evaluating your teaching

UCL students deserve and expect the best possible learning experience.

Evaluating your teaching is a way of ensuring that you are doing all you can to help your students achieve their potential.

By regularly evaluating your teaching you are more likely to provide your students with a continually improving learning experience.

What evaluating your teaching means

Evaluating your teaching means looking back over your teaching to see how well it's gone and how you can improve it in the future.

It can include looking at:

- subject-specific elements, such as content you covered or course materials you provided

- the modes of teaching you used, for example lectures, seminars, group work or use of technology (see the large-group teaching, small-group teaching and digital education toolkits on the Teaching and Learning Portal)

- more general, transferable aspects of teaching, such as your own personal style, tone or use of language (see the Inclusive teaching toolkit)

There are many different sources of evidence you can draw on to evaluate your teaching, such as:

- continual self-reflection: regularly evaluating your own performance

- informal student feedback: asking students what they think you are doing well or could be improved

- input or feedback from your colleagues, which could be part of the UCL Peer Dialogue Scheme

- student assessments: evidence that students have understood the course content

- formal student feedback at the end of a module or entire programme, or the feedback students give in the National Student Survey or Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (find out more about UCL student surveys under 'Student Engagement' on the Teaching and Learning Portal).

Putting it into practice

Self-reflection

Although time is precious, try to reflect on your teaching performance regularly. For example, after every teaching session, consider asking yourself:

- How did the session go?

- Did the students seem engaged?

- Did the students seem to be learning?

Consider using Lecturecast, UCL's system for recording lectures and making them available online.

Top tip

Vary the evaluation techniques you use, so that students don't become bored by them or give less thought to the answers they provide.

Lecturecast provides analytics, such as telling you which sections of your lectures were viewed more than others. These may be the sections that were most difficult for your students to understand.

Continual evaluation can allow you to make improvements to your approach or method of teaching.

Informal student feedback

At certain points in a session, module or programme, it can be useful to find out from students the aspects of the learning environment they find helpful or difficult, and which specific content they might be struggling with.

Informal student feedback is often anonymised and is only shared between you and your students. It is not examined by your wider department or faculty.

Below are some practical suggestions of ways to gather feedback for evaluating your teaching.

Traffic-light feedback

Use red, yellow and green sticky notes to evaluate your students' learning preferences or comprehension. For example, you could ask your students to:

- write down which methods of learning (e.g. group work) or aspects of the module (e.g. use of jargon) they would like to reduce (red), continue (yellow) or see more of (green).

- rate aspects of course content that they still don't understand (red), would like to discuss more (yellow) or fully grasp (green).

One-minute papers

At the end of a lecture, you could get your students to spend one minute writing down what they have learnt from that session.

Using an audience response system

Using their own devices – laptops, tablets or phones – students can give you instant feedback that is displayed on the screen, usually in the form of a bar chart or as free text comments.

You can combine this with some of the following suggestions or you can be creative ('What was the hardest thing to understand today', 'If you could change one thing about this course after reading week, what would that be' or 'Which of the following statements do you agree with the most').

A large number of systems exist and they have different strengths and weaknesses, particularly if you are using the free versions. Lecturecast might be an option, but you can also try:

- Mentimeter

- Socrative

- Poll Everywhere

- Vox Vote

or a growing number of other software.

Putting it into practice

Evaluation from colleagues

Getting feedback from colleagues is a really useful way of evaluating your teaching.

You could:

- ask a colleague if they would be willing to watch some of your teaching sessions and give you feedback

- talk with a colleague about a particular problem or issue you are having

- ask if you can watch other colleagues in their teaching sessions to get ideas about best practice.

For more information, see the Peer Dialogue toolkit on the Teaching and Learning Portal.

Top tip

Remember to close the feedback loop: feed back to the students what was raised in the evaluation and tell them what you will be doing to address potential issues.

If you cannot address something, it is often still worth explaining why to students so they know you are listening to them.

Doing an evaluation before reading week and feeding back to students after reading week ensures there is time for you to respond to the students' feedback.

End-of-course questionnaire

UCL strongly recommends that you ask your students to complete evaluation questionnaires at the end of course units and programmes.

Staff on some programmes run their questionnaires during the final teaching session, while others wait until after exams, allowing teachers to ask for feedback on how well-prepared students felt for their finals.

Currently, departments or faculties are responsible for overseeing questionnaire formats, so it is worth checking your local regulations and guidelines.

Top tip

By evaluating your teaching throughout your course, your students will see the immediate benefits.

If you only evaluate at the end, students may feel that providing feedback is too late to help them.

Conducting some evaluation before reading week can often be a good first step.

Writing a questionnaire

First, prioritise what you want to find out from your students and, if possible, involve them in the questionnaire design.

Ask single questions (don't combine two or more questions into one).

Don't ask too many questions. Students should be able to complete the questionnaire quickly.

Make sure the questions are clear and don't lead students towards a particular answer. Test the questions with colleagues first.

Decide whether you are likely to get better responses by asking students to complete the questionnaire in class or in their spare time.

Consider using a combination of a Likert-scale (e.g. 1 to 5) and free-text answers. Likert-scale answers can make issues easier to identify, whereas free-text responses can provide richer content, explaining why students felt a particular problem occurred.

Where to find help and support

arena@ucl.ac.uk: contact the UCL Arena Centre

- If you are a new member of UCL staff (i.e. still on your probationary period), speak to your mentor or attend the Arena Two course at the UCL Arena Centre.

- Speak to your teaching lead.

- Attend an Arena event.

- Consider getting more input from your students, such as asking them if they'd like to do a UCL ChangeMakers project. ChangeMakers projects are intended to innovate or enhance the learning experience at UCL. Finding out what your students would like to improve will give you further information for evaluating your teaching.

bit.ly/EvaluateYourTeaching: to access this full online guide, including links and further resources.