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“They Don’t Read My Feedback!” Strategies to Encourage Reception and Application of Course Feedback

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Giving feedback in university courses allows for the provision of supportive ideas for improvement, elaboration, and/or heightened thinking as students prepare for job factors outside of their university preparation. Feedback (giving and receiving) includes a set of skills that is apparent in any job setting and that can engage people in supporting ongoing personal and professional development. However, in conversations with faculty, many discuss that although they take the time to write or discuss explicit feedback with their students, the students may not read it or if they do read it, they don’t apply the feedback given to future course assignments which can lead to frustration from faculty leading to a ‘what’s the point then?’ attitude. However, with a specific framework embedded into a course that is described, modeled, and then applied with students, feedback can become informative and transformative both during and post-university training.

Feedback Literacy

Feedback Literacy was first introduced in 2012 by Sutton where he posited that when a person is literate in feedback, they are able to ‘...read, interpret, and use written feedback’ (p. 31) which allows students to make better use of feedback that is given and enable their own evaluative judgment (Molloy et al., 2019). In order to create students who

are feedback literate, faculty need to understand and embody skills and strategies that support the provision of effective feedback with a true understanding of the following standards: (1) student commits to feedback as improvement, (2) appreciates feedback as an active process, (3) elicits information to improve learning, (4) processes feedback information, (5) acknowledges and works with emotions, (6) acknowledges feedback as a reciprocal process, and (7) enacts outcomes of processing feedback information (Molloy et al., 2019). When this framework is followed, students have a baseline for seeing what specific feedback competencies they need to develop and how to monitor their progress towards these targets.

Ferguson (2011) proposes that student feedback is both valuable and important, but many times, according to students, the feedback is often helpful. How do faculty get to the point where ‘helpful’ feedback is provided, students are ‘feedback literate,’ feedback is actively received, and students apply the feedback? First and foremost, faculty and students need to have a common understanding of what feedback refers to, how it will be given, and expectations for the application of the feedback after it is received. We believe that four aspects are the foundation of faculty providing effective feedback which include:

1. **Trust:** students believing that the faculty member wants them to grow and gain competency in their knowledge related to course content
2. **Communication:** students receive clear expectations on assignments and assessments
3. **Consistency:** students receive information from the faculty member on a regular basis and assignments are scored in an expected way with feedback to promote growth in learning
4. **Authenticity:** students receive explicit feedback that addresses areas of strength and needed improvement

Embedding effective feedback

In alignment with the feedback framework developed by Molloy et al. (2019), faculty can embed feedback into their courses in the following ways:

Student commits to feedback as improvement

Molloy et al. (2019) discusses using feedback to not only improve a score on an assignment, but also to improve a skill. Repeating assignments that teach a skill are a great example. In this scenario, a student must commit to applying feedback not only for grade purposes, but also to improve their skill. The explicit application of feedback by students across repeating assignments encourages students to recognize that growth and improvement are possible. An example of this could be an assignment that requires students to analyze research articles, an important skill. Typically, the first submission of an article analysis is missing many pieces (i.e., independent variable, data analysis, etc.); however, by providing explicit feedback in each of the areas, students can not only improve their grade on the next submission, but also improve their article analysis skill.

Student appreciates feedback as an active process and student elicits information to improve learning

Providing quality feedback that can aid in developing students as independent learners (Brown, 2007; Ferguson, 2011) leads to students recognizing the active process of learning and beginning to seek out feedback to improve work. A means for creating an active learning environment can include scaffolded assignments in which students submit pieces of work incrementally prior to submitting the whole, larger assignment. Using this structure, students can actively apply feedback to subsequent submissions. By applying feedback, students are in turn learning how to improve their overall coursework and generalize the use of feedback to illicit improvements on assignments within future courses. Students are also able to begin actively soliciting feedback from multiple sources in an effort to



improve their learning and performance. For example, should a course require a large annotated bibliography to be submitted at the end of the course, the faculty responsible for the course might have students submit a small number of annotations prior to the larger assignment being due in order to provide correction feedback to students.

Student will process feedback information and student acknowledges and works with emotions

Ferguson (2011) found that many students reported the presence of an abundance of negative feedback caused students to, in a sense, 'give up' on the work. The task then for faculty is to determine a way to provide constructive feedback for students that encourages goal setting and keeps the emotional response or feelings of failure at bay. Molloy et al. (2019) found that feedback should be respectful with ample examples of what a corrected version should look like. Rather than simply expressing to a student through a comment that a portion of an assignment is incorrect, provide the student with feedback that explicitly explains what is incorrect, why it is incorrect, and how the student can correct the work. For example, if an assignment requires in-text citations, rather than only marking the citation as incorrect, give the student what the citation would look like in the corrected form.

Student will acknowledge feedback as a reciprocal process and student enacts outcomes of processing feedback information

Turnaround times is an additional factor that faculty are able to control, and students have indicated that the amount of time to provide feedback can range in length. Two major pieces related to the time it takes to receive feedback were that it should come before the next assignment is due so that it could be applied to that assignment and also that if a faculty member does take a longer time to provide feedback it should be substantial (Ferguson, 2011). Additionally, students should solicit feedback from multiple sources and this could include a mentor that could provide practical suggestions for improvement (Kwok, 2018). For example, a faculty member could potentially establish peer mentors in a course in which students could openly discuss their feedback to establish feedback reciprocity and also commit to the use of feedback for continuous improvement.

Feedback is a critical component in supporting student learning. Specific and calculated decisions in course structure and design can create an environment in which student development is dependent on the application of feedback. As suggested herein, there are multiple ways in which faculty can employ a variety of assignments that require students to apply feedback in order to further develop a skill and also influence the overall grade in the course.

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