

A Guide to the Mid-Term Chat

...where instructors hear from students while it can still do them all some good

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What's a mid-term chat?

The mid-term chat is designed to improve teaching and learning by providing instructors with narrative feedback from their students halfway through teaching a course. The instructor invites a colleague to talk with her/his students at the mid-term. The students discuss *strengths and successes* of the course (and the instructor's teaching of it) to the mid-term point in the semester and their *requests and suggestions* for the remainder of the course (and/or for future such courses). This process is based on the "small-group instructional diagnosis" process developed at Miami University of Ohio and other institutions.

Preparations

1. The instructor finds a congenial colleague with whom to collaborate in conducting the chat. Each instructor chats with the other instructor's students.
2. The instructor arranges dates and times for the chat facilitator to visit each class. In our experience, each chat takes about an hour.
3. In advance of chat day, students and instructor talk about the mid-term chat: why they are doing it, what it involves, how students can contribute. Instructors might ask students to write informally (writing to learn and explore) in advance of chat day as a way of gathering their thoughts about strengths/successes and requests/suggestions.

Chat day and follow-up

1. The instructor introduces the chat facilitator to the students, and reminds students of the nature and purpose of the mid-term chat. Then the instructor leaves the classroom and the facilitator takes over.
2. Working in small groups, students generate lists of strengths and successes as well as requests and suggestions. The facilitator then gathers students together in a large group and leads discussion. The facilitator invites one comment at a time from each group (round-robin style), starting with strengths and successes and then moving on to requests and suggestions.
3. The facilitator will ask one student to be the "scribe" who will write down each statement presented by a small group and read it back to the whole group. For the sake of clarity and diplomacy, *limited* discussion and negotiation of each statement's wording can be useful.
4. Once the list of statements (strengths and successes, requests and suggestions) is complete, the facilitator or the scribe reads each statement aloud, and asks for a show of hands from all those who agree. The scribe notes in parentheses at the end of each statement the number of people present who agree with each statement. This tells the professor/ instructor the breadth of agreement with each point on the list.
5. The facilitator gratefully takes the completed chat record from the scribe, and then delivers the chat record to the professor/ instructor in the form of an informal report.
6. Chat colleagues meet to share thoughts on the chats and offer clarifications and contextualizations of statements on the chat records.
7. Each professor/instructor discusses with her/his students the chat record, asking for clarification or elaboration when necessary (while also insuring that anonymity is preserved) and discussing ways in which s/he plans to respond to the various statements in the chat record.