Formative Course Evaluation

• Why?
  - Uncover problems early on; fix broken stuff (hopefully before students find it)
  - Discover potential usability/accessibility issues
  - Improve functionality
  - Dynamic nature of online learning

• What? When?
  - An ongoing process, usually done both during development and while being taught
  - Asks the question, “How are we doing?”

• Who? (Who will use this evaluation information?)
  - Course development team
  - Instructor

• How? (What should be evaluated?)
  - Instructional materials
  - Instructional strategies
  - Use of tools and technology

Questions to Ask

• Do learning activities and assessments align with the learning objectives?
• Do learning materials meet quality standards?
  - Are learning materials error-free?
  - Are learning materials accessible?
  - Are learning materials usable?
• Are the technology tools appropriate and working properly?
Formative Evaluation: Gathering data

• Course development rubrics
• Checklists
• Focus group feedback
• For consistency and repeatability
  -- To reduce bias, evaluation should not be done by members of the course development team...you need a “fresh pair of eyes”
  -- Develop a testing process/protocol/list of questions/evaluation forms
  -- Determine a standardized, set time for testing so it occurs regularly as a normal part of the process
• Help desk error logs
• Student FAQ discussion threads
• “Extra credit for errors found” idea
• Faculty notes jotted down during semester
Summative Course Evaluation

• Why?
  – Examine effectiveness
  – Improve functionality
  – Discover causes for failures...fix existing problems
  – What works in theory doesn’t always work in practice
  – Constant maintenance and improvements to content and instructional strategies...the dynamic nature of online learning

• What? When?
  – Usually done after the completion of each semester
  – Asks the question, “How did we do?”

• Who? (will use this evaluation information?)
  – Instructor
  – Course development team
  – Administration

• How? (What should be evaluated?)
  – Effectiveness of instructional materials and strategies
  – The learning environment (interactivity and communication)
  – The instructor’s teaching skills
  – Availability and ease of use of tools and technology
  – Activities and assessments
  – Instructor satisfaction with the online teaching experience
  – Student satisfaction with the online learning experience
Summative Evaluation: Questions to Ask

• Did the students succeed? (grades)
  – Did the learning activities and assessments align with the learning objectives?
  – Were assignments and assessment appropriate to the content? (test item analysis)
  – Was time adequate to convey material and complete tasks?

• Level of instructor and student satisfaction (participation and opinion)
  – Were learning materials easy to use and accessible? What content did students frequently have problems with? What areas of the course are error-prone?
  – Was the communication and interactivity between students adequate?
  – Was the communication and interactivity between students and the instructor(s) adequate?
  – Were there any concerns about motivation?
  – What tools did the instructor or students frequently have problems with? Should we continue to use chosen tools?

• Are program/department needs being met?
  – accreditations, prerequisites for other courses, competencies
  – Is the course scalable?

Summative Evaluation: Gathering data

• Student grades
• Student surveys
• Instructor satisfaction surveys
• Learner self-assessments
• Pretest/posttest comparisons
• Assessment or test item analysis
• Focus group feedback
• Help desk error logs
• Discussion forum and chat archives or other technology captured evidence
Confirmative Course Evaluation

• Why?
  – Discover long-term level of effectiveness of the course within the program / department
  – Discover long-term level of effectiveness of the course for students
  – Identify large-scale changes necessary to the curriculum
  – Constant maintenance and improvements to technology, content and strategies

• What? When?
  – Usually done some time after the completion of at least two semesters
  – Asks the question, “How are we doing now?”

• Who? (will use the evaluation information?)
  – Instructor
  – Administration

• How? (What is being evaluated?)
  – Students’ long-term retention of learning, usefulness to their long-term goals
  – Long term effectiveness of the course within the program
  – Technology tools

Questions to Ask
• Are program/department needs being met (accreditations, prerequisites for other courses, competencies)
• Trends in level of student satisfaction
• Course still valuable / meaningful / current / relevant to students’ long-term goals? (program/career)
• Is the course scaleable?
• Is the course sustainable?
• Learning environment; are technology, tools still meeting our needs?

Gathering data
Program student surveys
• Departmental / administrative opinions
• Faculty peer review of learning materials
• Employer surveys (professional development)
• Retention data
• Help desk logs
• Learning management system study / survey
Revision Plans

Sample Formative Evaluation and Revision Plan

• Checkpoint #1 – syllabus, outline and first lesson
• Checkpoint #2 – half of the course, test all technology (e.g. on multiple platforms)
• Checkpoint #3 – Entire course proofread/edited
• Checkpoint #4 – Entire course Q/A checked
• Checkpoint #5 – Final check (previous errors corrected)
• Student survey after first three lessons
• Instructor survey after first three lessons
• Examination of request for assistance/problems
• Analysis of problems found
  – How urgent is it?
  – How long will it take to fix?
• Assign each issue a priority score
• Prioritized list of change requests...when’s the best time to revise?
• Assign corrections and establish a deadline for each
• Make note of unaddressed issues

Sample Summative Evaluation and Revision Plan

• Analyze student and faculty satisfaction surveys, identify common themes or trends
• Analyze assessment
  * grade distribution
  * item analysis as needed
  * pre-test / post-test comparisons
• Analyze request for assistance/problems, identify common issues
• Examine course archives (discussions, chats, etc.)
• Compile list of issues (including issues noted during formative phase that have yet to be addressed)
• Research solutions as needed
• Determine time needed to fix each issue
• Assign priority ratings
• Assign tasks and establish deadlines