Making Sense of Student Feedback

Guidelines for Department Heads, Deans, Associate Deans, and education leaders who are responsible for supervising, mentoring and assessing academic staff.

1. What are the responsibilities of leaders in assessment and mentoring of teaching practice?
   - To support a teaching and learning culture. Because of teaching’s importance, we work to develop the quality of teaching and learning experiences for students and academic staff.
   - Encourage and support educational mentorship and leadership amongst academic staff within your unit. For e.g. “Your students really love _____ about your teaching, have you thought about hosting a lunch and learn on this practice?”

2. How does student feedback help teaching development and growth of academic staff?
   - Student feedback, both summative and formative, is used to promote reflection of a teaching experience and areas for teaching growth.
   - Constructive feedback from students can help academic staff identify what’s working and what could be modified to enhance their learning and experience.

3. How to support someone feeling anxious/defensive/overwhelmed by their student feedback?
   - Support academic staff to view the feedback as information that can lead to goal setting and professional development (recognize and encourage these efforts).
   - Work together with the academic staff to find patterns and trends emerging in their feedback and know that there will be anomalies. Allow opportunities for academic staff to put their student feedback into context and make sense of the feedback. As a starting point, base conversations on their reflections instead of your interpretation of their student feedback.

4. How do we interpret student data and feedback?
   - Student ratings of their experiences provide an opportunity to understand students’ perceptions of their learning experience. They are not a measure of teaching quality or student learning.
   - Student feedback (both qualitative and quantitative) should be a component that is considered along with other sources of evidence. There is no single source of evidence that can ascertain teaching quality.
   - Research shows that bias exists in course evaluations and ratings of instruction. Students’ ratings of academic staff are influenced by expectations associated with gender, class, race and age and are also influenced by discipline.
   - For more details on how to interpret student ratings, please refer to the Responsible Use of Student Feedback document.

Teaching Development Resources and References
   - Student feedback is most impactful when it is accompanied by a clear suggestion of specific resources and confidential assistance available that academic staff can access.
   - Consider referring academic staff to your faculty’s teaching supports or to resources at the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning.