

Questions for Professors

Thanks so much for agreeing to chat with us. We're a group of MIDS students working on our capstone and as part of our class, we're conducting a number of interviews to better understand our stakeholders.

We'll first start off with some general questions and then begin to dive deeper into our topic of feedback. All of what we discuss today will not be shared with anyone but internally in our four-person team. If at anytime you'd like to pass on a question or come back later to it, we're happy to do so. Before we start, do you have any questions?

Great let's begin!

First we'll ask some questions about your background in teaching.

- *Name*
 - Kevin Cook
- *Date*
 - 2/25/19
- *Would you mind telling me how long you've been teaching?*
 - First in person class was when he was working on his master's in 1997 (32 yrs ago, master's students had to teach undergrad students, which is no longer allowed; TAs could teach freshman and sophomore level classes and professors were "much too important to teach lower div classes")
 - First yr teaching: lower div classes (fundamentals of programming and c++)
 - Second yr teaching: bridge courses (fundamentals of programming and c++) for people who are doing computer science master's with no undergrad CS degree
 - After working full time, he taught community college until about 6 yrs ago - fundamentals of programming part time
 - Have been with MIDS for 6 semesters, this is his 7th, taught w205 23? times and cryptography 2 times

Thank you! Now we'll move into our focus of what we're investigating, which is student feedback and satisfaction regarding the courses you have taught and are teaching.

Q: in your own words, what is your preferred way of receiving feedback?

A: Berkeley has midterm and final evaluations. Outside of those two times, Kevin tells students they are welcome to come to him with any feedback but people rarely take him up on his offer. Midterm eval were done on survey monkey up until last summer. Survey monkey was all questions written by ischool. Last fall, berkeley said you can't do that, you have to use berkeley system so ischool switched. Berkeley questions are not specific to ischool so kevin liked survey

monkey much better -- students had couple weeks to fill them out and instructors got the survey results about a day after the survey closed (thank you Inessa.) Berkeley system takes FOREVER to get back, and by then you're already on new semester so hard to implement changes. By the time Berkeley official mid term eval comes back, there are only few weeks left in semester so not much to change. MIDS calendar has three equal length semesters that do not match regular Berkeley semesters so official Berkeley survey timing does not work well for MIDS and overall hurts MIDS instructors. Kevin thinks optional student name field will make it easier for him to understand what the source of the feedback is and get the full scope. Kevin used to give credits for filling out evals (5% of final grade) so he always had 100% response rate.

Q: Have you noticed any difference if people provide more informal feedback in person vs virtual (quantity etc.)?

A: Nothing beats in person, but he understands the benefit of virtual learning/giving feedback. For his in person class at UT, people who work have a hard time coming to class due to commute. Benefit of online is that time management is better but instructors lose out on face-to-face context, such as demeanor, and can't always pick up on a lot of the clues. Anonymity -- some people do things and say things online they wouldn't in person. People who sit up front vs sit in the back, who come to speak to him etc. *usually* reflects final grades -- this is hard to gauge online (he's taught a class of 500 students, and depending on where students sit and whether they come or not, how they participate, "physical clues" is highly reflective of final outcome and you miss out on ALL of this online; Kevin doesn't know if people are paying attention, if they're playing on their phone, working on other class assignments etc.)

Q: Of the feedback you currently get (survey monkey or Berkeley system) how much do you feel the content was actionable vs information? Is one type of feedback more useful?

A: As an instructor there are far too much constraints on Berkeley teaching, such as pre-recorded async, set textbooks for cryptography class, hodge podge of reading for W205. Outside of Berkeley teaching, Kevin had academic freedom (final exam can count only for 1%, for example) and evaluate the students anyway he wanted as long as Kevin met his objectives (state and federal laws that instructors have to follow). Berkeley, because of set async, he and other instructors HAVE to do the same assignments, for example. When teaching a regular class, if students say they don't like an assignment Kevin can change it the following semester -- for Berkeley, even with the feedback he gets, there's still a lot that he can't change. Also, Kevin wants students to know that no matter how much students complain about async to Kevin, there is literally nothing he can do -- make your complaints to people who can actually do something about it. This probably happens too because students are not aware the instructors have no power to change. Ex. W205 is the first technical class after optional python course, and because it is optional there is too much variability in student's technical skills (third of students say they're bored, third says they're in panic, third are just going with the flow) but this isn't something that can be solved unless Berkeley can raise the minimum standard to everyone having a CS undergrad degree OR add more bridge courses to help students learn more before they come

into the first technical course. SO, a lot of the biggest feedback/complaints kevin gets is unsolvable :(

Q: What would be your ideal feedback gathering method etc.?

A: Divvy up feedback to different topics (if there's feedback on async, the main person that receives the feedback shouldn't be Kevin. Happy to be cc'd on it, but it should go to the person responsible for the content such as 2U). A lot of the course leads are gone so it's rEALLY hard to change the course content. Instructors are AT THE MERCY OF SOMEONE ELSE'S CURRICULUM but the course content creator is failing to support it because they're gone. Feedback on assignment content has to go to someone else, Kevin doesn't write the assignment. So at the end of the day, there's really not much that's left for instructors to change (not much they have control over).