



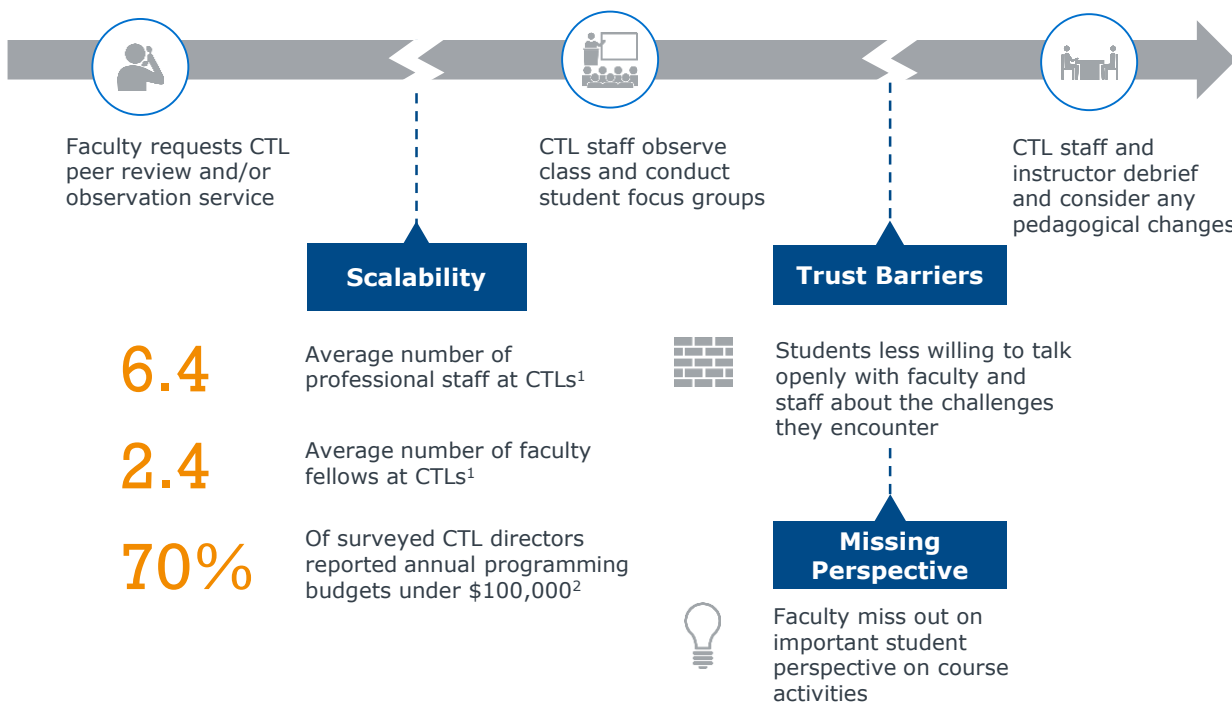
# Use Students Consultants to Provide Mid-Semester Course Design Feedback



# Most Faculty Struggle to Adjust Courses Mid-Semester

## Traditional Faculty and Staff Observations Have Limited Reach

While it is essential for faculty to proactively design a student and learning-focused course, they often benefit from in-the-moment advice about the changes they have made to their teaching practice. Most institutions meet this need by offering peer or staff observation services through their centers of teaching and learning. While this approach gives faculty student and peer feedback about their teaching practice it also runs into three challenges that limit its efficacy.



By relying solely on professional staff and faculty to provide this service, the scale of the program is limited by funding and staffing constraints. However, even at institutions with capacity this approach may not always yield the most informative results. Research<sup>3</sup> indicates that inconsistent relationships with authority figures, particularly during K-12, creates a trust barrier between underrepresented students and staff. Consequently, students are often less willing to talk openly with staff and faculty about the challenges they might encounter in a course – preventing instructors from making crucial pedagogical changes. Similarly, by only using faculty and staff for observations, instructors often miss the crucial perspective of the students themselves, who can contextualize the course within the rest of the curriculum.

1) Based on survey data from University System of Maryland Project on Leading Academic Change: An Early Market Scan of Leading-edge Postsecondary Academic Innovation.  
 2) Beach, Andrea L., Mary Deane Sorcinelli, Ann E. Austin, and Jaclyn K. Rivard. 2016. Faculty Development in the Age of Evidence  
 3) Yeager, D. S., Purdie-Vaughns, V., Yang, S.,\* & Cohen, G. L. (2017). [Loss of institutional trust among racial and ethnic minority adolescents: Consequence of procedural injustice, cause of behavioral disengagement](#). *Child Development, 88*, 658-676

Source: Yeager, D. S., Purdie-Vaughns, V., Yang, S.,\* & Cohen, G. L. (2017). [Loss of institutional trust among racial and ethnic minority adolescents: Consequence of procedural injustice, cause of behavioral disengagement](#). *Child Development, 88*, 658-676; Beach, Andrea L., Mary Deane Sorcinelli, Ann E. Austin, and Jaclyn K. Rivard. 2016. Faculty Development in the Age of Evidence: Current Practices, Future Imperatives. Sterling, VA: Stylus.; University System of Maryland Project on Leading Academic Change: An Early Market Scan of Leading-edge Postsecondary Academic Innovation.

# Student Consultants Bypass Scale and Trust Concerns

## Comprehensive Professional Staff Support Critical to Program Success

One way to solve these issues is to hire and train student consultants to observe faculty, conduct student focus groups, and provide actionable feedback to instructors. Many institutions such as Bryn Mawr College, University of California, Merced, Berea College, Brigham Young University, and Minnesota State University, Mankato offer some version of such a program through their centers of teaching and learning (CTLs). These programs build on students' prior experience in educational roles such as peer tutors, teaching assistants and create a unique experiential learning opportunity for them.

### Students' Prior Experience Complemented by Intensive Training and CTL Staff Support

#### Requirements

- Prior experience in an educational role (e.g. writing assistant, teaching assistant, peer tutor) or education-related coursework
- At least sophomore standing
- Faculty and student recommendation letters or faculty referral

#### Training

- Consultants attend multiple training sessions on data gathering, analysis, and reporting
- Consultants learn how to use and provide different assessment tools such as videotaping, class interviewing, focus groups, and surveys
- Can include weekly meetings with CTL staff and/or faculty partner

BRYN MAWR  
COLLEGE

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
MERCED

  
MINNESOTA STATE  
UNIVERSITY  
MANKATO

BEREA  
COLLEGE

BYU

### Student Consultant Program at University of California, Merced By the Numbers

**\$11-13.50**

Hourly rate paid to consultants, commensurate with experience

**6-7**

Average number of hours worked per week

**14-16**

Number of student consultants at the Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning

To ensure the efficacy of the program students who are selected for these roles must attend CTL staff-led training sessions on data gathering, analysis, and reporting. These training sessions help introduce students to the various assessment tools they will be expected to use, such as videotaping, class interviewing, and focus groups. At some institutions, like Bryn Mawr College, student consultants attend weekly meetings with CTL staff to discuss their faculty partnerships and get advice about their classroom observations. The program at the University of California, Merced facilitates professional growth and skill development through an apprenticeship model for their consultants. This allows students to receive promotions with more responsibilities and higher pay.

Source: Bryn Mawr College, Student Consultants; University of California, Merced, SATAL Intern Job Listing; University of California, Merced, Meet the SATAL Students; Students Consulting on Teaching Faculty Handbook, Minnesota State University at Mankato; Students Consulting on Teaching Program, Minnesota State University, Mankato.

# Creating a Portfolio of Service Options

## On-Demand, Customizable Engagement Helps Faculty Get Desired Advice

One unique element of the Students Assessing Teaching and Learning (SATAL) program at University of California, Merced is the level of customization available to faculty. When requesting the services of a student consultant faculty can specify the type of observation that will be most helpful to them. This includes class observations, focus groups, and exit interviews with graduating seniors to assess the skills and knowledge acquired after completing a major or minor in the relevant program.

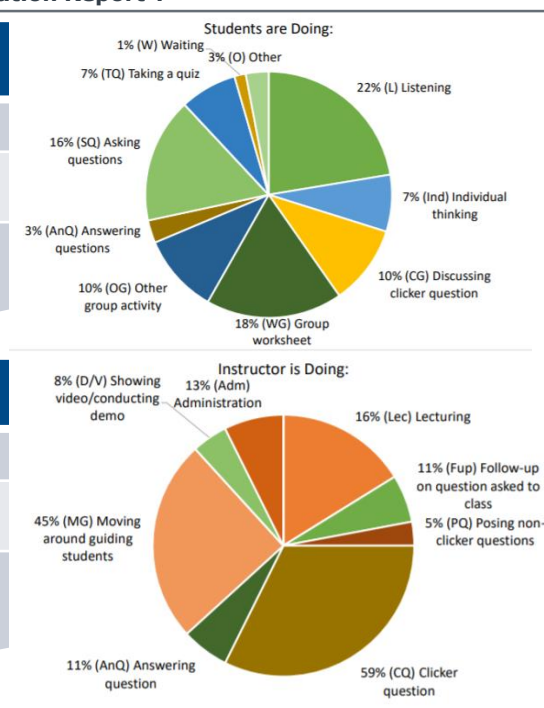
### Multiple Consultant Service Options<sup>1</sup> Align Feedback with Faculty Goals

- Class Observation:** record classroom activities with an emphasis on how time is spent
- Entry Survey:** administer survey to assess students' skills and knowledge at the start of semester
- Focus Groups:** facilitate discussion with students and produce a summary report
- Supplemental Mid/End-Course Evaluations:** administer faculty-designed questionnaire, tabulate results, and write summary report
- Exit Interview:** conduct group interviews with seniors to assess skills and knowledge after completing major/minor and produce summary report

#### Sample Class Observation Report<sup>2</sup>:

Student Activity Code	% of Time	Mins <sup>3</sup>
Listening	22%	17
Individual thinking	7%	6
Group worksheet	18%	13

Instructor Activity Code	% of Time	Mins <sup>3</sup>
Lecturing	16%	12
Clicker question	32%	24
Moving around class guiding students	25%	19



After completing the desired service, students write a summary report. Faculty use this data to modify their teaching practice and learn of any unintended consequences of their course design. Research at Bryn Mawr College has found that faculty and student participants benefit from such programming. It increases faculty capacity to experiment with new pedagogical approaches, gain real-time feedback about their teaching approach, and become more connected to students. Similarly, student consultants report building greater confidence, capacity, and agency as learners by participating in the program.

1) Adapted from University of California, Merced [SATAL Services Request Form](#)

2) Adapted from University of California, Merced, [Sample Class Observation Summary Report](#)

3) Minutes

Source: University of California, Merced, Students Assessing Teaching and Learning (SATAL); University of California, Merced, SATAL Services Request Form; University of California, Merced, Sample Class Observation Summary Report.

# Student-Mediated Advice Facilitates Faculty Innovation

## Experiential Learning Opportunity Helps Student Participants Grow Skills

The program at University of California, Merced has also been successful in providing faculty with tangible advice to help create a more learner-centered teaching environment. For example, some instructors have incorporated review sessions into their lectures by asking the class to collectively create an outline of topics prior to major exams. In program feedback, many instructors noted that students in their classes were more willing to share honest feedback with their peers than with the instructor themselves.



### Program Facilitates Tangible Change to Instructor Pedagogy and Student Skill Development

“I already made specific changes to the course: giving students copies of completed quizzes with correct answers after the quiz is over, giving students a study guide for midterm exams, and changing the way I call on students to ensure all students are called on.”

*Psychology Professor, UC Merced*

88%



Of consultants reported improvements in **Research, Teamwork & Leadership, and Communication** skills

“The student-centered aspect [of the program] seems to be very effective. It seems students in the class are much more willing to give honest feedback to other students doing the evaluation. Customizing the evaluation in terms of what to focus on when getting feedback from students in the class was also very nice to have.”

*Psychology/Cognitive Science Lecturer, UC Merced*

+600



Total number of SATAL service requests since program launch (2009-2017)

Moreover, faculty find the service helpful as a majority of SATAL service requests are repeat requests from the same faculty member or program. This allows faculty to continue to iterate on their teaching practice while incorporating their students' perspectives.

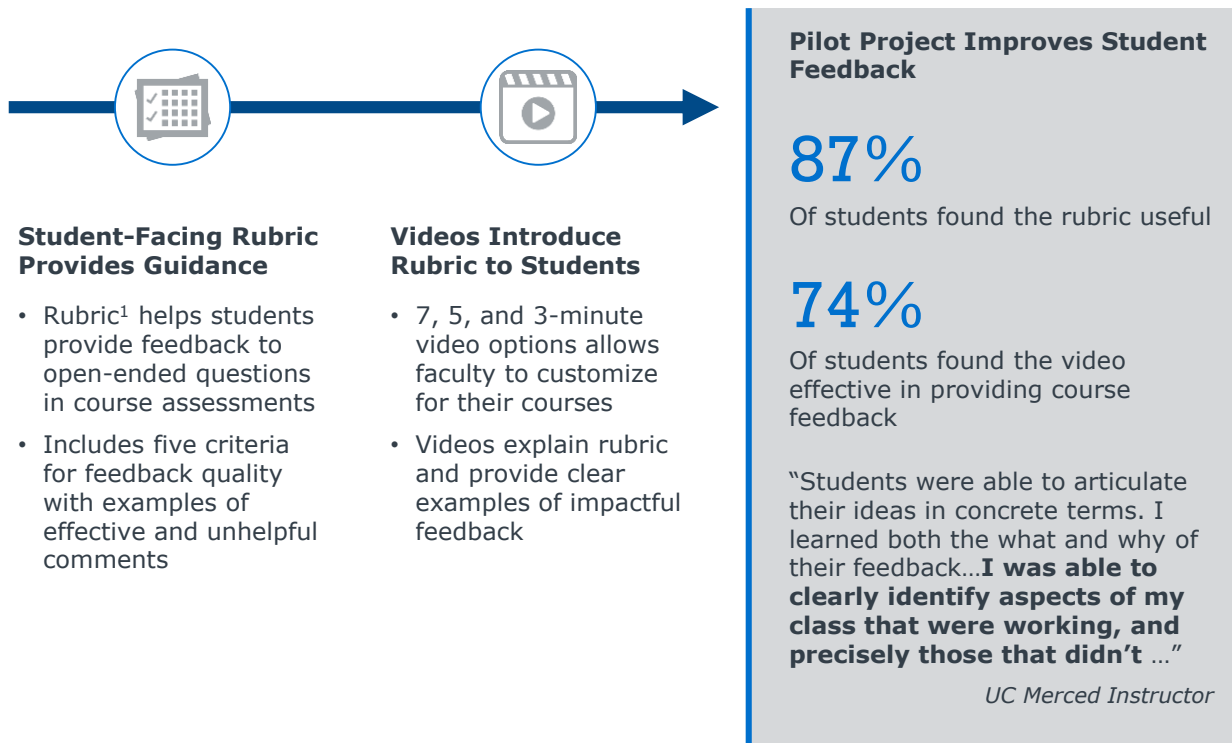
Student participants also benefit from the program. In self-reported survey results majority of students reported improvements in their research, teamwork, leadership and communication skills.

# Helping Students Provide Meaningful Feedback

## Consultant-Led Workshops Provides Scalable Teaching and Learning Support

In addition to providing feedback to faculty and serving as a mediator between students and instructors, student consultants also participate in other CTL programming. At the University of California, Merced student consultants assisted with an institutional review board approved research project that aimed to help students provide helpful feedback in course evaluations. As part of this project, student consultants led workshops where they introduced their peers to a rubric that guides them through providing feedback to open-ended questions.

### Consultants Scale Support With Peer-Led Workshops on Course Evaluation Feedback



The rubric emphasizes that students should offer commentary on the learning environment, provide constructive feedback with examples, and focus on elements that instructors can control. Student consultants also created 7, 5, and 3-minute videos that faculty can use to introduce students to the rubric to scale the program. Assessments show that students found the rubric and video useful in helping them provide course feedback – this was most evident in upper-division courses where students were better able to articulate the impact of instructor’s pedagogy on learning outcomes. This program helps scale CTL support and effectively leverages peers to support students in providing faculty with useful course feedback.

1) Rubric available on UC Merced CETL website, [here](#).

Source: University of California, Merced, Students Helping Students Provide Valuable Course Feedback [Poster](#) and [Handout](#); University of California, Merced, SATAL Metrics



Washington DC | Richmond | Birmingham | Minneapolis

202-747-1000 | [eab.com](http://eab.com)