Using IDEA -- Best Practices

The Committee on Teaching Evaluation has compiled a list of IDEA best practices. Documents mentioned here are available from the Faculty Development website: [www.stthomas.edu/fdc/idea](http://www.stthomas.edu/fdc/idea).

I. As you prepare your syllabus and discuss it in class
   a. Review the 12 IDEA objectives and select no more than 3-5 that you deem essential or important for meeting your instructional goals for the course (see IDEA document “Selecting IDEA Objectives” from the Faculty Development website, above)
   b. List these objectives on your syllabus. It’s a good idea to tailor the wording of IDEA objectives to fit your course/discipline vocabulary and goals. See examples of how this works for different disciplines in the IDEA document “Integrating IDEA Objectives into a Course Syllabus.”
   c. On the first day of class, discuss your objectives and show students how class activities align with them.

II. The FIF (Faculty Information Form)
   a. After identifying your course objectives (see part I above), fill out your IDEA Faculty Information Form for each class you are teaching. Log on to Murphy Online and click on the “Faculty and Advisors” tab. Within the “Faculty Services” menu you will find a link to “IDEA FIF.” This form allows you to identify your Essential and Important course objectives and will also require that you answer some questions about course and student characteristics. It’s important that you fill out the form completely and submit (see website above for sample FIF and “Directions to Faculty” document). It is possible to revise the form during the semester if necessary; just re-enter data and submit. FIF forms must be completed by the last day of class for student feedback to be processed.

   For more information on completing the FIF, go to the Institutional Effectiveness webpage here, which includes a link to a tutorial: [http://www.stthomas.edu/ie/ira/facultyevaluation/](http://www.stthomas.edu/ie/ira/facultyevaluation/)

III. Mid-semester evaluation
   a. Develop and administer a mid-semester evaluation form to assess progress on meeting your objectives and collect other relevant information. See [www.stthomas.edu/fdc/idea](http://www.stthomas.edu/fdc/idea) for a sample form.
   b. Report the results to your students and, if relevant, consider ways you might modify the course for the remaining weeks to strengthen progress toward your goals.
IV. Selecting the long vs. the short form for year-end evaluation
   a. Around mid-semester, you will elect to use either the Diagnostic (long) or short form for student feedback (samples of each are available on the website above; see also “Sample Report” for a sample instructor feedback document based on use of the Diagnostic form). It is recommended that you use the Diagnostic form, especially if you are teaching a new course or making modifications to an old course.

V. Administering the IDEA forms at the end of the course
   a. Optional – extra questions. If there are additional questions you would like to add, see the document “Directions to Faculty,” page 4. You can add up to 20 questions on either the Short form or the Diagnostic form.

   b. Administration

      i. Administer the evaluation process at the beginning of your class period about two weeks prior to the end of the course. Make sure you allow enough time for students to complete forms in an unhurried fashion.
      ii. Follow the instructions included with your evaluation packet.
      iii. Emphasize to students the importance of their honest feedback and discuss briefly how you use student feedback to inform your teaching.
      iv. Let students know that written comments are an important contributor to improving your teaching effectiveness, and encourage them to include them. You may also want to write specific questions on the board for students to answer in the comments section.
      v. Find a reliable student to collect and return completed forms.
      vi. You must leave the room while students complete forms, but you may ask a faculty peer to proctor the evaluation session if you wish.

VI. Using Results to Improve Teaching Effectiveness
   a. Have a discussion with your chair to clarify department/college norms regarding scores on objectives and overall ratings
   b. Understand how your scores have been adjusted by watching the IDEA training video on this topic (http://www.theideacenter.org/news/new-videos-about-idea) and reviewing data from “Description of Course and Students” on p. 2 of your feedback form.
   c. Review feedback on objectives. Consider whether you are selecting too many objectives or inappropriate objectives.
   d. Examine data on “Teaching Methods and Styles” on p. 3 (long form); identify both areas of strength and areas for improvement. Some of these are correlated with your teaching objectives and influence those scores (relevance of individual items to your teaching objectives is indicated on p. 3).
   e. If you are concerned about your “Excellent Teacher” and “Excellent Course” ratings, pay special attention to items 4, 6, 10, and 13 on p. 3 of the long form. These items are highly correlated with the two global “Teacher” and “Course” ratings.
f. After identifying Teaching Methods and Styles that need attention, visit the IDEA website to download “Notes on Instruction” and “Notes on Learning” that are linked to specific teaching methods and course objectives. These provide useful advice and teaching tips for improving performance.

g. Review student comments and pay special attention to repeated themes or concerns. Keep in mind: students’ definitions of terms like “professional” and “organized” may not match common faculty definitions.¹

h. Consider discussing your IDEA feedback with your chair, your department mentor, a trusted colleague, or Faculty Development consultant.

i. As you prepare your annual report, identify both strengths and ideas for improvement; outline specific ideas to implement.

j. Review your improvement plans when organizing your syllabus and planning to teach the course again.