

Narrative Reflection, Summer 2019
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MTH 105

What Went Well

Success with Increasing Course Survey Response Rates: In my last narrative reflection, I outlined a method for getting more students to participate in course surveys. For the reader's convenience, here is what I wrote:

In the future I am going to offer extra credit for students to respond to the course survey. This extra credit will be an assignment worth an entire homework grade to really make it worth the students' effort. Moreover, I will offer full credit on the assignment to everyone in the course ONLY if 80% of students in the course respond. Otherwise, the assignment will remain ungraded, and no extra credit will be awarded. It is my hope that this will create further incentive for the entire group to participate. It is my hope that peer pressure to participate will be strong among students.

I am happy to say that it appears that this strategy has worked. My response rate among currently enrolled students was more than 80%. (Please note that the 68.97% figure in the student evaluations for this term includes some students who had already dropped the course which lowers the "official" response rate.) This is an excellent turnout in comparison to preceding terms.

The Course: My numerical feedback overall was decent. The most common rating (the mode) which students gave me was a 5 on all survey items. Other measures of center (mean and median) were no lower than 4.1 which suggest that overall, things went well. Compared to the department, these ratings are good, but this had more to do with the fact my 20 students made up more than half of total of the 39 students who were taking math courses and participated in their course survey. Thus, the decile ranks and departmental comparisons aren't very meaningful here.

I am particularly pleased with my written feedback. Many students acknowledged my efforts to be very available to them via ZOOM and email. Many students also expressed that navigating the course presented them with little to no difficulty. Another theme that I noticed in the written feedback is that some students expressed that they were not confident of being successful in the beginning of the course, but toward the end of the course they were very happy that they decided to stay with it. The written feedback I have received this term has helped me to feel more confident that the changes I've been making to this course are actually making it better.

Where To Improve

Several students expressed that they would like to see worked-out examples in the course notes. As I have mentioned in past narrative evaluations, I have sound reason for not doing this. However, repeated call from students to make this happen make me think that it might be time to at least consider making this a reality. Making this change will require a substantial amount of time and effort since working out the examples and writing out the code for each problem will take quite a while. Again, my hesitation in doing this is not the effort involved in making this happen, but that students will less inclined to follow the lecture whether in a face-to-face or online setting.

Moreover, if a student wants already-worked-out solutions, our course textbook has plenty of them. Furthermore, there are lots of worked-out examples online. Thus, my dilemma is: do I hold out, firmly believing that having them write out my solutions with me is for their own good? Or do I give them what they want? Would it be as instructive if I did? Whatever the case may be, this is one change I am considering to all of my courses.

Looking to the numerical feedback for where I might improve, my lowest mean rating (4.1 out of 5) was for question 5:

Q5: My grade reflects how much I learned.

In my narrative evaluation for spring, this same question appeared as an area for improvement. Although I have not carried out the change of swapping out the POW (Problem of the Week) for a project, a mean of 4.1 is better than last term's mean (3.8 out of 5). The increased participation rates mentioned above may also have played a role in this change as I hope it is more representative of a typical class.

With the above being said though, thinking about this survey last term really got me thinking about bringing projects back into the course. I think there is so much potential for students to explore mathematical ideas that are closer to their own interests like political science, language, economics, and so forth. I would like this project to fit into a broader theme of math and society: mathematical knowledge is empowering and enables citizens to make better choices for themselves and society.

What Lies Ahead

Continue with Improving Survey Response Rates: The resounding success of the method described above means I am going to try it again next term. It is my hope that this was not merely a fluke.

Projects for MTH 105: Although I will need to do some serious thinking about what I want my students to get out of a project, I am excited to imagine what students might do for a project or culminating experience in the course.