ELLA WATSON: Hi everyone. My name is Ella Watson and I'm in education. Learning at the University of Alberta and welcome to teaching plus.

I'm here today with Doctor Lisa White shoes and industrial professor with the Faculty of Engineering, and she's here today to talk to us about using student feedback throughout, of course. So welcome, Lisa.

DR. LISA WHITE: Thank you.

ELLA WATSON: So, Lisa, can you tell me about why your team collects student feedback?

DR. LISA WHITE: Yeah, sure. Student feedback is really useful for us to evaluate how students are feeling about the course material. Do they have questions? Are there things that need to be improved immediately? It's very immediate and helpful that way, so that if they tell us something, we can take it on board and improve the course in real time, rather than waiting until the end of the semestre for the USRI feedback. This is much more immediate for us to find ways to improve as we go through the semestre.

ELLA WATSON: Great. So, what's an example of something that you've improved say this semestre based on student comments?

DR. LISA WHITE: Yeah. So, one of the things that we have gotten for feedback is providing case study examples or providing more examples. The student feedback was, “it would be helpful if you could put that into an example for us, a scenario, so, that we can understand what that would look like in the real world.”

ELLA WATSON: So, students are asking for more real-world stuff and you were able to put that into your lectures?

DR LISA WHITE: Absolutely. It's easy, right? And as with us being professional engineers and having come from industry, it's easy to put the examples in, is just, yeah, just hadn't thought of doing it before, cause, we're teaching these theoretical concepts.

ELLA WATSON: So, can you tell me about how you collect student feedback, and, what you do with it when you get it?

DR LISA WHITE: Sure. So, we use an online feedback tool called mentimetre.com. And, so, what we do is we throw up a slide, a menti-slide. The students have a code that they can input to go into the slide and provide feedback on the questions that we ask. The questions are fairly simple. We ask, what should we continue doing? What should we stop doing? And, do you have any other questions or feedback that you want to provide to us? If you want to, you can leave it open for a day or an hour, or however long you want, and the students can then answer offline like once they're out of the class. If they hadn't had time to sit and think about, you know, what should we start? What should we stop? What should we continue doing? Those are the three questions. Start doing. Stop doing and continue doing. And yeah, so they can either answer right then and there in the class before they leave, or they can take it home and take, you know, however long they need. Once they've thought of some useful feedback to give us after the fact. So, we usually leave it open for a day or two afterwards.

ELLA WATSON: Hopefully for students who are not in class.

DR LISA WHITE: Yes, absolutely. No, no, they all show up to class, of course.

[laughter]

ELLA WATSON: OK, so I know that you have an opportunity to work on a teaching team because you have quite a big class. Do you as a teaching team talk about the feedback or what do you do with it?

DR LISA WHITE: Sure, of course we talk about the feedback. As a group, we have, well, this past semestre we had three instructors and so when each of us got the feedback, we sat down kind of compiled it for ourselves and then put it all up on screen so that we could take it in its entirety. That's extremely helpful. cause we can see where there are parallels between groups and where there are differences and that sort of thing.

ELLA WATSON: OK, so what happens with the feedback after you read it?

DR LISA WHITE: So, we discuss it, obviously, and then if there are improvements to be made, we do what we can to start making them and then we follow up with the students afterwards. We'll take our little summaries back to class the next week so that they can actually see that their feedback has been viewed, has been listened to, and that we're actually implementing their ideas for improvement.

ELLA WATSON: Have you gotten feedback on collecting feedback?

DR LISA WHITE: Yes. The USRI feedback isn't particularly well done in terms of the uptake. I think we only get about 30% of the students providing feedback. But when we do it in real time, you know, take 10 minutes at the end of class, or take an hour to think after class and we get much better uptake on that.

ELLA WATSON: Interesting.

DR LISA WHITE: I don't know what the percentages are. We have to look at it, but it gives the students an immediate opportunity. Like the USRI stuffs at the end of the semestre. They never hear back. They don't really see what improvements we've made for the next year. cause, they're obviously not going to take the class again, whereas I think they see more value in the immediate feedback.

ELLA WATSON: And using instructing you find it more useful the feedback throughout the term as opposed to the end of term?

DR LISA WHITE: Absolutely. Absolutely. It's such a waste of time to be doing something the entire semestre and then only find out at the end that that wasn't extremely useful for the students. Cause the whole idea is that we need to find new ways of engaging students, new way of teaching them so that they understand and can live and breathe the concepts that we're teaching them to have to wait until the end of the semestre to figure out that they didn't. They didn't understand a certain concept. It's completely wasteful. So, it's much better to learn about it earlier on in the term.

ELLA WATSON: So, you've mentioned that you often collect feedback about your teaching in your courses, what are some other ways that you collect student feedback? At the end of a couple of lectures where it's there, they are quite involved, there’s a lot of concepts coming at the students really fast. We threw up a menti-slide at the end saying what questions do you have regarding this particular concept? And it blew my mind the things that they were asking. Some of them were extremely obvious, but I haven't thought to point out in the course, cause, I assumed, that's always a problem, assumed that they already knew those things, and some of them were extremely pointed, intelligent, thoughtful questions that, to be honest with you, I hadn't even thought about until they'd ask them. But they come from. They come from all different perspectives, our students come, like we have mature students, we have students from different countries, we have students with a great deal of Co-op experience, and most of them are fourth year, so, they've got lots of industry experience in different areas than our instructors. So, the students can also offer really good insight into some of the concepts that we’re teaching to the point where with these questions that they asked and then we would go through them in class and answer them as best we could. I do follow up on some of them and figure out how could I explain that or answer that particular question and then come back later on, and it's being worked into our lectures for the rest of the lectures in the semestre. And then for future lectures in future semestres that the information will already be worked in. So, the students are essentially helping to improve us, delivering that course material in the future as well. Yeah, super amazing.

ELLA WATSON: So, your team started out using student feedback as you know, feedback on the teaching and what's happening class. But now you're actually talking about feedback on the learning and moving to that piece, especially you said for concepts that you think are going to be difficult?

DR LISA WHITE: Yes.

ELLA WATSON: Yeah, that's great. And I think that that's a fantastic way to evolve your feedback once you start.

DR LISA WHITE: And it's so good. Again, it's getting inside their heads. Rather than just asking students to put up their hands and ask a question out loud, many, many students are far too intimidated. They think their questions are stupid, or they just don't feel comfortable speaking up in front of 100 of their peers. So, providing them the opportunity to write down the question online, right when we're teaching the concept, when you're like, yeah, you know what? I don't, I don't quite get that. Then you ask the question. What questions do you have? And we get, yeah, we get all sorts of questions and it's really, really useful.

ELLA WATSON: OK. Well, I think that, you know, you can see that it's really important to your team and to you to use this feedback, and do you feel that this feedback has improved your teaching?

DR LISA WHITE: Absolutely, no question whatsoever. I remember earlier in the semestre, and this might not seem like a big deal. It was less about the students not understanding the concept. It was about my teaching style in particular, and so one of the students had mentioned that I'm enthusiastic when I teach in class and that you know, I try to be positive and be upbeat and be as in the moment, and enthusiastic about the material as I can be to make it interesting for the students and they sit there with like kind of a deer in the headlights look for the most part. So, I don't know if my enthusiasm, my motivation is actually getting across and so to actually get that feedback back from a couple of students that said, we really like the fact that you’re enthusiastic, keep doing the, you know, keeping being enthusiastic and it makes the material a lot more interesting. Thank you. Because with them just sitting there on a day-to-day basis. You'd have no idea if that was, you know, if that's actually helping or not.

ELLA WATSON: Yeah, you have trouble relying on the blank stare as any form of feedback.

DR LISA WHITE: Right.

ELLA WATSON: So, the written feedback is making an improvement there.

DR LISA WATSON: Yes, exactly.

ELLA WATSON: Great, that's good to hear. Are there any final thoughts that you want to share with us on using student feedback?

DR LISA WHITE: Real time feedback is extremely useful, especially for those of us that wouldn't typically use feedback. There's so much more that we can do to improve the student learning experience, and this is one key piece of technology we can use to really improve the experience. Cause we get all sorts of feedback, examples, yet keep keeping enthusiastic. It's start popping around in the in the handbook so much which we already knew. All sorts of stuff.

ELLA WATSON: and kind of lights on. Turn the lights off.

DR LISA WATSON: Right? Rooms too cold. OK, well, I didn't know that. Like-

ELLA WATSON: Use a microphone.

DR LISA WHITE: Right? Exactly. So, some of it's more useful than other stuff, but at least we get inside their heads, right? Especially in large classes where, you know, there might be a hundred, 150 students in the class. We don't know what they're thinking. We don't know where they're at, and when we take the midterm, that's the first time we actually find out whether or not they're getting it. And so, if we can move up that feedback a bit earlier in the course, I think we did our first set of feedback after the 4th week of class, and then we get inside their heads and we find out where they're at now and what can we do to improve things so that it's not so far down into the semestre before we can start helping them.

ELLA WATSON: Well, thank you so much-

DR LISA WHITE: No problem.

ELLA WATSON: -for talking to me.

DR LISA WHITE: Thanks for inviting me.

ELLA WATSON: That was Doctor Lisa White, and she was talking to us about using student feedback throughout her course. And I love the quote of we're using student feedback to get inside their heads a little bit earlier than the assessment. We will put information about the tool that you mentioned, mentimetre.com onto our website. But thank you for listening to teaching plus until next time.

Thank you for listening to teaching plus this teaching close podcast is created by the University of Alberta Centre for Teaching and Learning Team. For more information on any of our services, please find us online at ctl.ualberta.ca until next time, keep tweaking your teaching.