

From Holly Martin

Part II, Chapter 9, Voices from the Field: Increasing First-Year Student Engagement through Mid-year Self-reflections

Aiming for Excellence activities for readers

- Brainstorm the technical questions associated with the survey first. Discuss the feasibility of sending a short on-line survey to first-year students. Can the survey be returned directly to the student's advisor? Will it be a part of the student's official file? If you are using e-portfolios, can midyear e-portfolio prompts take the place of the mid-year survey? If filling out the survey on-line is problematic, can a paper and pencil version of the survey be given to the students to do immediately before going in to see their advisor?
- Determine what might be the best timing for the mid-year survey--immediately after first-semester finals or just before they return to campus for the second semester? Is there a method for reminding those who have not finished the survey to do so? Be prepared to keep track of the number of responses you receive and to do some experimentation in timing to find the optimal moment for the students.
- Determine the best mid-year questions for your students—questions that will help them take note of their successes, the learning methods that are working for them, and their actual interests, as well as those areas they wish to tackle next to improve. The best questions for assisting students in becoming become more aware and more engaged in their education will vary by institution and student populations.
- Before writing your questions do some research on recent work on the connection between social belonging and academic achievement, such as that done by Gregory Walton of Stanford University (<http://www.stanford.edu/~gwalton/home/Research.html>). Also take a look at the work done on “stereotype threat” pioneered by Claude Steele. Both have implications for ways in which to write questions that will encourage students to engage in their work rather than subtly undermine their confidence. If possible have your campus experts on crafting surveys (institutional research?) take a look at your questions before you finalize them.
- Take plenty of time to do advisor training on how to read the survey results and on best practices for working with students in light of their responses. Both advisors and students need to understand how their responses can assist the student in further devising their own academic plans.