

Mid-Course Student Focus Groups
Elon University Center for the Advancement of Teaching & Learning

The Center is dedicated to providing faculty with confidential and formative feedback on their teaching. The Center will gather information about a course only at the request of the teacher. The Center does not make feedback available to anyone except the teacher.

Faculty: x	Consultant: Peter Felten
Course: x	Focus group date: x
Students: 17	Groups: 7

The text below is a complete transcription of what students wrote in the small group portion of this exercise. All student comments appear unedited, unless otherwise noted. Student comments have been sorted to emphasize common themes, and the numbers in parentheses indicate the number of groups giving that response.

What aspects of this course are most helping you learn?

- Class discussion (4)
 - Class discussion helps clarify readings
 - The discussions since the readings are better understood
 - In-depth large-group discussions
- Small group work on specific topics (3)
 - Small groups allow closer analysis of topics
- Writing assignments for each class session (3)
 - The small pre-class writing assignments, and the feedback we get each day
 - Pre-class writing helps with analysis of texts and understanding of contexts
- Team teaching of outside material (2)
 - Group presentation – partners
- Good opportunities concerning paper – rough draft due a week before, and peer review
- Peer review of papers
- Professor-instigated discussion and background information
- Cultural background provided helps with understanding of context
- Comparative works
- Learning about different disciplinary forms of analysis

What aspects of this course would you recommend be changed to enhance your learning? Specific suggestions?

- Limiting the amount of reading for each class (4)
 - So much reading at once makes it difficult to absorb before coming to class because sometimes the length makes it boring
 - Smaller sections of reading, especially for Wednesday classes – having a hard time processing what we read because there’s not enough time to go back to certain sections
 - Monday and Wednesday assignments in particular
 - Too much reading in a short period of time – it is too much material to grasp – suggestion: cut out one book
- Expectations on pre-class writing (2)
 - The pressure to fulfill the expectations prevents us from investigating an aspect of the text that fascinates us, in order to be proficient in another topic and thus get a better grade
 - Be more specific about grading daily writing – often points are taken off and there is no stated reason as to why
- More variety of activities (2)
 - Breaking up with video clips, in class writing, etc.
 - Mix of activities – more small groups and a variety of teaching methods
- Change small groups each time to experience full range of patterns of analysis
- Student-led discussions – having less material read by everyone to stimulate better discussion
- Make everyone participate in discussion – perhaps by sharing pre-writing, etc – a few people talk but it’s because no one else will
 - Suggestion: participation points??
 - Suggestion: direct questions to specific individuals who don’t contribute?
- More feedback and explanations for grades

What else would you like to tell the professor about this course?

- Class discussion topics are too narrow – they don’t allow for engaging debate over classmates’ ideas – feels a bit didactic, answering questions when we already know what answer is expected – participating feels obligatory
- Interesting subject matter
- Discussion-based course needs more participation – not your fault, but class members need to speak and contribute insights
- Grading is fair
- Helpful with essays
- It’s an interesting course concept
- Dr. X has been successful at teaching the subject, but improvements in implementation are needed
- Given the class topic, we’re right on track