

20 Progress Report Journal

Midterm evaluations bring a host of institutional measures to reach out to under-achieving students, such as grade reports. What might make the most difference to students' success in the course is to enable them to assess their own performance in the class, set goals and provide questions and feedback to the instructor accordingly. I do this through a "Progress Report" online journal assignment. Since I make all grades available on Moodle, our learning management system, students can see their grades, but often they don't check or acknowledge that these grades are available to them (since many professors will not provide these grades automatically).

Therefore, about a third of the way through the semester, students are required to complete a Progress Report journal in which they:

- Report their overall grade in the course.
- Report their attendance record (since attendance is required in my course).
- Reflect on their performance, whether it meets their expectations.
- Provide goals for the rest of the course (often in the form of a GPA).
- Provide feedback and questions for me on the class in general.

Students take anywhere from 50 to 400 words to complete this journal, based on their needs. While we may consider ourselves open to student feedback, students often interpret this as their first opportunity to reflect on the course and ask questions. Some will provide context for their content knowledge and other school responsibilities, which is often very enlightening for me. Students generally express gratitude at the official opportunity to assess their progress in the course (even more so when they are doing poorly) because it is early enough in the semester to make progress. Even with brief feedback on the instructor's part, they see it as the professor reaching out and caring about individual students.

Even in the case of students who are negative and critical, it provides an opportunity for the instructor to show understanding and explain course procedure, more effectively shutting down grumblings and increasing course satisfaction. In some cases, it also provides an opportunity to improve our courses and correct mistakes.

I implement this in a writing-intensive course that is capped at 22 students; in courses with more than 50 students, you may want to offer this as extra credit to control review flow. Even for classes with around 50 students, this activity would not take long for the tremendous benefit it provides to the class dynamic, student success and your end-of-the-semester evaluations. Many student progress reports do not require individual responses if they are happy with their grades and the course in general.

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