

Essays on Teaching Excellence

Toward the Best in the Academy

Volume 22, Number 4, 2010-11

A publication of The Professional & Organizational Development Network
in Higher Education (www.podnetwork.org).

Down with the SGID! Long Live the QCD!

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No one knows better than faculty developers the difficulty of change. Numerous clichés such as “Old habits die hard” or “The more things change, the more they stay the same” express the proverbial wisdom regarding such entrenched rituals. Many faculty developers routinely use an assessment tool called Small Group Instructional Diagnosis (SGID) developed by Joseph Clark (Clark & Redmond, 1982) during his tenure as FIPSE (Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education) project director at the University of Washington, Seattle. The authors challenge our colleagues to re-think these old habits and consider replacing—or at least supplementing—the SGID with a far more efficient and effective tool called a Quick Course Diagnosis (QCD).

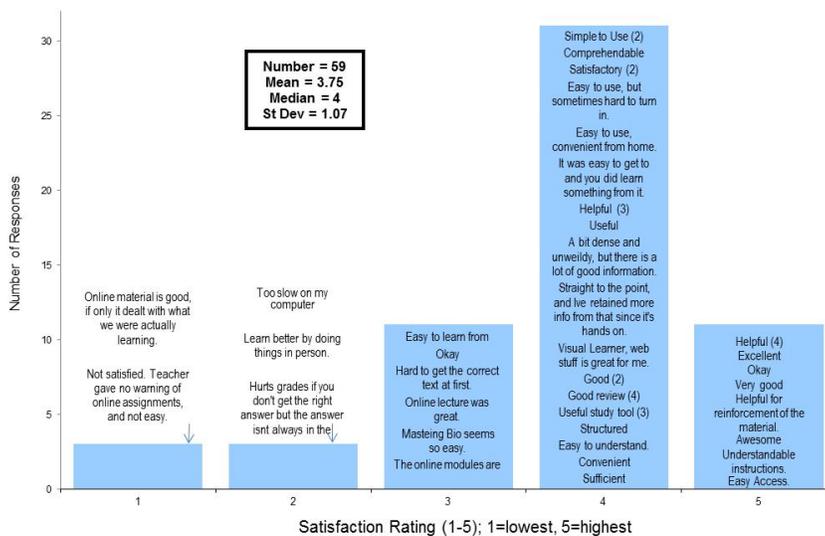
The QCD is indebted to the inventors and practitioners of the SGID, but it builds on the strengths of the SGID while adding new assessment dimensions contributed by at least three POD faculty developers. The process has been around for well over a decade. The key elements of the QCD were developed by Millis (2004) while at the U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA) as part of a broader structured focus group protocol. She and Marie Revak, the USAFA assessment director who coined the term QCD, received a POD “Bright Idea” Recognition Award (now the Innovation Award) in 2001. Later, Ed Nuhfer, CSU, Channel Islands, added a new component to capture data about student learning outcomes.

The SGID and the QCD processes have in common two features: (1) they are framed by pre-and post client/faculty interviews, making them highly relevant and accountable, and (2) both processes ask students to identify course strengths and weaknesses.

For a QCD, the faculty member, or other client, meets with the faculty developer to discuss objectives and any changes to the basic protocol. S/he prepares the class for the 15-minute experience and leaves the room during the QCD. Later, s/he meets with the faculty developer to review the data and to plan improvements.

For the processing, the faculty development team (one person to ten, depending on the class size) greets the students and explains the procedures. Students are asked to write on an index card a number from one to five indicating their satisfaction level with the course and a word or phrase to clarify their experience (“awesome,” “confusing,” etc.). For the report, these data are dropped into a histogram that displays the number of students and lists each number and the associated words or phrases.

Figure 1: Sample Histogram from a QCD



The team then displays for students (if the instructor requests this), via a projector or multiple hard copies, a numbered list of the student learning outcomes (SLOs) for the course. On the reverse side of the index card, the students indicate (by recording their numbers) the two SLOs they felt were best met and the two that were least fulfilled.

During the final stage of the QCD, students form groups of five-seven and on a highly structured form, they identify the course (or program) strengths and weaknesses using a cooperative brainstorming technique called

“roundtable” where students rapidly pass around a sheet of paper, adding ideas as they say them aloud. The groups then rank the top three strengths and the top three weaknesses. These data are recorded onto a single template, group by group, and then analyzed by a person skilled in trend analysis, usually the faculty developer. Common themes are coded with the same color across teams, thus emphasizing the common strengths or issues. For example, if four teams mention “poor textbook” or anything similar (e.g., “textbook sucks”), a reader will see red in all the team ratings, if that is the color selected for “poor textbook.”

Figure 2: Sample Color-coded Table from a QCD

Rank-Ordering of Recitation <u>Strengths</u>			Rank-Ordering of Recitation <u>Weaknesses</u>		
<u>Color Code</u>	<u>Thread</u>	<u>No. of Occurrences</u>	<u>Color Code</u>	<u>Thread</u>	<u>No. of Occurrences</u>
	Research	3		Classwork/Homework/Review	5
	Homework/Activities	3		Papers	5
	Lecture/Presentation/Content	3		(Stand alone items)	2
	(Stand alone items)	3			12
		12			
Results			Results		
<u>Team One</u>	<u>Team Two</u>	<u>Team Three</u>	<u>Team One</u>	<u>Team Two</u>	<u>Team Three</u>
Keeps you on task	Very Original- topic rarely discussed academically	Provides us the opportunity to learn about women who few	Biased perspectives enforced on students	Too much busy work with no real point	Less homework and more draft
Builds writing skills	Very Informative	Allows us to freely think and write	Should do conference after final paper, not draft	Too much homework-should relate to our papers	Have 4 drafts due of 5pg. And peer review for each to have more feedback
Frequent papers allowed us to stay on track	Challenging	Allows us to do raw research on a topic rather new topic	Cannot expect us to be elite on the topic of our papers when we havent even finished	Not enough time to produce a paper that truly encompasses the thesis	No public speaking because it does not relate to the course

Basically, the QCD has nine distinct advantages over the SGID: (1) The QCD captures far more data. The initial index card activity—which focuses on satisfaction levels—and its resulting histogram, provides unique and highly effective assessment data. The subsequent activity on student learning outcomes captures data important for assessment and accreditation purposes. The data on course strengths and weaknesses allow for across-group correlations, highlighting ideas identified independently by various student cohorts. (2) Because of its highly structured nature, the QCD requires less in-class time to administer than an SGID. Even in large classes the entire process can be conducted in roughly 15 minutes. Although the SGID protocol presumably takes no more than 15-20 minutes to complete, in practice, many faculty developers find that it takes longer because of the need for whole-class clarification and consensus. (3) The QCD offers less

possibility for errors. In a typical SGID, the final whole-class consensus data are captured on a whiteboard and copied down by a student volunteer. This practice can be problematical if the volunteer is careless or error-prone. Once the white board is erased, the data are gone. With the QCD process, the index cards and roundtable/ranking sheets are available for subsequent interpretations by multiple reviewers, if needed. (4) Unlike an SGID, during a QCD, no ideas are washed out by a whole-class consensus activity. Displayed in the color-coded table are the top three strengths and the top three weaknesses that all the teams identified, allowing for correlations. But, any other strengths and weaknesses noted are still available on the roundtable/ranking sheets. With an SGID, when a faculty developer prepares the letter to the faculty member, more ‘wash-out’ occurs because of the selection of representative phrases. (5) Unlike the SGID, the QCD is viable for data collection in large classes; faculty developers simply need people such as student workers to distribute and collect the index cards and roundtable/ranking sheets in large auditoriums; (6) The QCD is far more versatile than the SGID. The SGID, for example, is used only for course assessments; the QCD can be used for virtually any academically relevant assessment, including program assessment involving students, employers, or alumni. (7) Administering a QCD is virtually “fool-proof” because the quality of the data is derived from the written products, not the skills of facilitators. Thus, teaching and learning centers can expand their services without compromising quality by having graduate students or even administrative assistants administer the QCDs. (8) A key advantage of the QCD over the SGID is the opportunity to generate reports using templates. With an SGID the faculty developer must create a formal letter or report summarizing the data. Preparing this report is not only time-consuming, but it also involves judgments in identifying trends and choosing representative comments. The QCD standardizes the results with the two visual documents, the histogram and the color coded table. Some decisions must be made about the coding. Trained administrative assistants or graduate students can easily prepare these two documents in a fraction of the time required to produce an SGID report. Furthermore, since all of the input from the activity is included, the person creating the report does not have to decide what goes in and what stays out of the report. In this way, the process is much more objective than the process needed to create the SGID letters. (9) Finally, the histograms and color-coded tables provide easy-to-interpret evidence of assessment. These reports are not only visually useful, but unlike the SGID letters, they are also practical for longitudinal analysis. Instructors, for instance, can see patterns in student satisfaction levels by comparing the

histograms for different semesters. Furthermore, instructors can analyze changes in specific course elements, such as the choice of textbooks, by comparing color-coded tables for different semesters. Given the benefits of these two reports, it is not surprising that several accrediting bodies—including the Higher Learning Commission, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) and Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET)—have reacted with high praise for them.

Despite the advantages of QCDs highlighted above, we do not suggest eliminating SGIDs from the faculty developer's toolbox. SGIDs do generate some results, such as the representative comments, that differ from the data in a typical QCD. Furthermore, a skilled SGID facilitator engages students in thoughtful reflection about their feedback.

In the end, faculty developers can offer both options, highlighting the pros and cons of each protocol and then allowing faculty to select the one that best meets their interests. In most cases, faculty developers aiming to maximize impact and conserve time and resources will encourage faculty/clients to opt for the Quick Course Diagnosis.

References

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