**[Activity:]** Roses and Thorns Feedback

**[Overview:]** Students provided feedback on the highlights of lecture (Roses) and confusing concepts (Thorns) through a weekly online form, providing students with time for reflection and instructors with the ability to address areas of confusion.

**Goals:**

* to quickly determine which concepts were the most difficult for students to understand so that the instructor could email out clarifications or spend more time during the next meeting
* to compel students to reflect on their learning and identify concepts that they were having trouble with

**Class:** OEB 10: Foundations of Biological Diversity

**Introduction/Background:** Students in this course learn about the processes that contribute to the origin and maintenance of biological diversity. To end discussion section each week, Heather Olins instructed students to fill out a brief Google Form with their “Roses” – what they learned or found most interesting in lecture and section that week– and “Thorns” – topics that were confusing or frustrating. In this way, the instructor constantly had a sense of the groups’ understanding and could quickly address confusing topics before students became lost.

**Procedure:**

* During the last few minutes of each section, the instructor put a short URL on the board and asked the students to go to the site and fill in a short poll (Google Form) that she called "Roses and Thorns".
* Students answered 2 questions about the section meeting:

1) The Rose: What was the most helpful/interesting/clarifying part of section this week? Did anything "click" today that was unclear in lecture last week?

2) The Thorn: What was the least clear/most frustrating part of section this week? Does anything now make less sense than it did in lecture last week?

* Student names were optional and answers were automatically compiled into a spreadsheet that the instructor could look over to assess student learning during the section meeting.

**Materials:**

Example screenshot of poll, attached

**Comments from Instructor:**

The instructor thinks this activity is “ideally suited for a course where there is a lot of material covered in lecture and section is used to review some of that material, but there is never enough time to go over everything. Soliciting student feedback about how they felt about the process made them more engaged and made overall learning more efficient.” In fact, many students mentioned this simple activity in a positive way in their end-of-course evaluations.

The Roses and Thorns activity directly affected how the instructor conducted the rest of her teaching. She writes, “This activity enabled me to change the way I reviewed lecture material throughout the course based on what students felt was most useful. It provided direct feedback about how much time I was spending explaining concepts vs. letting students work in groups, enabling me to find a much better balance between the two methods than I would have otherwise.”

*Submitted by Heather Olins, Teaching Fellow, Harvard Department of Organismic and Evolutionary Biology*

*I love this! Such a simple activity to help check for understanding!*

*I’ve done this with my high school tutees and think it makes so much sense to use it at the college level as well!*