Some guidelines and principles to consider in making sense of evaluation feedback

In examining your student evaluations:
- Pick a good time to do so (enough time to digest [at least some of] the information; private; time afterwards to filter the issues through your cognitive and emotional 'systems')
- Track quantitative item results: think about the summary rating received this time for each item and consider how it fits with your overall goals for teaching, with your department's expectations for teaching
- Look for patterns in (do content analyses of) students' written responses: identify fully the things you've done well in the students' eyes and those things in need of improvement

Know that negative student evaluation feedback:
- Has made its presence known (up close and personal) to almost all faculty members (including those who are senior, successful, and highly regarded)
- Almost always *feels* . . . hurtful, painful, angering, you name it!
- Often identifies important areas for continued and productive development

Take the context of your own experience into account in making sense of the feedback: if you're new to teaching, new to the university, or even new to the course content, first semesters are often a time of learning about:
- Being a professor
- Teaching
- The content, structure, and 'rhythm' of this course
- Student expectations, background, preparation
- Departmental, college, and university expectations for teaching
- Resources for supporting and improving teaching

Take the context and characteristics of your courses into account in making sense of the feedback: examination of student evaluation data here and elsewhere suggests that student evaluations are often somewhat more positive in:
- Courses that are smaller rather than larger
- Courses that are elective (or more advanced in major) rather than required
- Courses in which students tend to do well rather than courses in which they tend to do less well

Know that examinations of student evaluations within and across universities often suggest that 'most frequently mentioned' areas for teaching improvement include:

- Clearer, more specific in-class communications
- Clearer, more explicit organization of course content

Know that you can take steps *during* the semester to maximize the likelihood of getting productive feedback at the end of the semester; for example:

- Use one minute evaluations at the end of selected class sessions (e.g., main thing learned today, two ideas about a major construct considered, a question about content, two ideas for things that might be done differently)
- Give a "midterm evaluation" of the course: use the official university form or create your own to check out how things are going–at a time when you can actually use the information to guide changes in this specific class (it can be especially useful to do this a session or two after the first exam is returned)
- Talk with the class about the importance of their feedback: explicitly put into practice a suggestion they've made; discuss issues on which you've gotten bimodal feedback (e.g., go faster v. slow down), describing what you're thinking and how you're planning to respond
- Seek Center for Teaching services; let the class know you're doing this and why you're doing it
- Talk with the class briefly before the final evaluation about the importance you attach to full, productive student feedback

Assume that everyone (you, your students, your department and the university) has much to gain from taking specific steps toward consistent improvement of your teaching:

- Talk with your chair about your department's expectations and recommendations for improving
- Ask your chair how your evaluations look in relation to the general pattern of evaluations for this course
- Talk with a more experienced colleague, again asking for advice, recommendations
- Talk with other (new) professors, sharing experiences and ideas
- Explore which of the Center for Teaching's services might be most helpful, when might be the best time for putting them to work
- Select one or two specific (big) ideas to work on improving next semester; stay focused on these, track your progress, engage varied support systems in helping with these particular areas