Student feedback & the Course Experience Survey

RMIT University has standardized the collection and reporting of course level student feedback in accordance with the university's Student Feedback Policy [http://www1.rmit.edu.au/students/studentfeedback]. This policy together with other factors requires the University to systematically and transparently obtain student feedback at individual course level. The Course Experience Survey (CES) is used for this purpose.

[http://www1.rmit.edu.au/ssc/ces]

Survey forms have two sections. The survey questions in Section One of the forms address the following themes:

- Feedback
- Quality of the Teaching and Learning environment
- Learning Objectives
- Clear Goals
- Assessment – workload
- Commitment of staff – pastoral care
- Course interest
- Overall Student Satisfaction
- Preparedness for the workplace

Additional question items can be added by individual staff to gather information of interest from a specific course or class.

Section Two of the form has spaces for student comments, and tick boxes for basic student demographic information. Student comments in Section Two complement the quantitative responses elicited from Section One to build a picture of the student's course experience for a specific teaching period.

The Survey Services Centre (SSC) has a comprehensive online FAQ [http://www.rmit.edu.au/ssc/ces/faq] about the CES. This webpage also has contact details for key staff who can answer questions about the CES.

Administering the Course Experience Questionnaire

The CES is administered online each time a course is offered. The survey is administered between weeks 9 to 12.

Each semester the SSC contacts schools with a list of courses to be surveyed. Schools validate the information and the SSC prepares the survey.

We cannot become what we want to be by remaining what we are.

Max DePree
Understanding the results – (HE)

Schools receive a document summarising the results for each class set of survey forms processed by the RMIT Survey Services Centre. Information at the top of page one includes staff name and course code and title. Useful demographic details on the cohort surveyed include age distribution, distribution of number of hours per week studied in the course, and the numbers of fulltime, part time and local or international students. These details provide background information against which to interpret the later results. From S1 2013, reliability bands will be published on all teacher reports.

The second part of page one gives a summary of responses to the survey items. The survey comprises 13 items with responses coded from 1 = ‘strongly disagree’ to 5 = ‘strongly agree’. All items are worded positively, so that higher scores indicate greater student satisfaction.

The summary graph shows the percentage of respondents who answered in the top two categories (‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’) for each item. Note that the scale displayed for these graphs varies according to the highest percentage achieved. Anyone scanning a number of these summary documents should be careful to take note of the scale used. As a general rule, any item achieving less than 65% agreement should give cause for reflection.

The final piece of information on the summary page is the Good Teaching Scale score, comprising items 8 to 13. This gives an overall indication of student satisfaction, and is the same scale used in program surveys including Student Experience Surveys.

The remaining pages of the document give the results for individual items, including the additional items that may have been included by the teacher. These must obviously be examined with the additional information of the wording of the items as provided separately to the students. Each individual item has a bar graph showing the response distribution together with a mean score based on the numerical values given to the responses. A mean of 4 or higher indicates a positive student response (an ‘average’ in the ‘agree’ to ‘strongly agree’ range).

Staff reflecting on their feedback results should first consider the overall Good Teaching Scale score, and then look at responses to individual items. Consistently low percentage agree scores or mean response scores in items grouped under a particular theme can indicate a need to focus on strategies for improvement in that area.

Interpreting & informing practice

The items in the Course Experience Survey can be classified into themes. These are listed below, together with some suggestions for staff to consider when formulating responses.
Teaching style – Organisation

1. The learning objectives in this course are clear to me
Do you:

- Align learning objectives, learning outcomes, learning activities and assessment? Do you evaluate this alignment? For example, do you know if there are gaps in it? Do you assess what you teach? Does your content contribute to the stated objectives of the course?
- Explain and discuss with students how the learning activities and assessments help them to achieve the learning objectives and outcomes?

Teaching style – Delivery

8. The teaching staff are extremely good at explaining things
10. The teaching staff in this course motivate me to do my best work
11. The teaching staff work hard to make this course interesting

Do you:

- Chunk your lecture into coherent sections? Introduce each section with an overview and explanation of where it fits with what has gone before? Summarise key points of each section at the end?
- Engage the students by seeking informal feedback at intermediate points in the class?
- Think about how the students engage with your material – do they just sit and listen?
- Provide opportunities through the lecture for students to make active responses?
- Provide work related examples to your students so that they may make the link between theory and practice.
- Organise guest speakers to give a lecture in your course which may add value to the content? How often do you invite a guest speaker?
- Use relevant examples of concepts (from current events, popular culture, etc) so students can connect to the content?
- Value-add to what is in the textbook? How do you do this?
- Allow for active student participation in tutorials using problems, case studies, questions, exercises?
- Provide plenty of opportunities in tutorials for students to raise and discuss questions with you?
- Use student centred teaching styles? Do you know on a weekly basis where your students are in relation to the learning outcomes of the course? Do you use micro evaluation techniques, such as asking your students on a regular basis: “What is the key thing you have learnt today?”, “What was the key thing you learnt in the last session?”
- Get feedback from different student groups, for example, international students, students from different programs?
Assessment & feedback

9. The teaching staff normally give me helpful feedback on how I am going in this course
3. Assessment tasks in this course require me to demonstrate what I am learning
4. The amount of work required in this course is about right
12. The staff make a real effort to understand the difficulties I may be having with my work
13. The staff put a lot of time into commenting on my work.

Do you:

• Look at the teaching and assessment schedule. Are the assessment tasks evenly placed through the semester? Is there sufficient time between introducing a concept and assessing it? Is the student workload spread fairly through the semester (within and between courses/programs in your School?)

• Provide opportunities for regular formal and informal feedback throughout the semester?

• Align the learning objectives, learning outcomes and assessment?

• Use strategies for providing bulk feedback. For example, using technology (eg Blackboard) to give comments on assessment strengths, deficiencies, common problems or issues?

• Provide a mark sheet to return with assignments which lists the assessment criteria, so students can see their performance against each criterion and how the overall mark was awarded? Do you provide feedback on each main criterion?

• Provide model answers, peer review and/or peer assessment opportunities? Do you know how to provide these opportunities in ways that benefit you and the learner?

• Explain written feedback with students upon request?

• Use specific strategies with students from non English speaking background or students with comprehension and learning difficulties?

• Use teaching and learning assessment/plagiarism support packages such as Turnitin?

Capabilities & workplace readiness

2. This course contributes to my confidence in tackling unfamiliar problems
5. I can see how this course will help me in the workplace

Do you:

• Use real life examples from the workplace in your lectures?

• Encourage students in the final year of their program to reflect on their co-op experiences and share them with fellow students as they relate to the particular subject matter?

• Teach students to be reflective practitioners? How do you assess this?

• Relate the content of your course to other courses in the program / common core as appropriate?
Useful resources

Support is available from your Deputy Head of School (Learning & Teaching) or equivalent. Your College Academic Development Group or learning & teaching specialist can also provide advice, support and professional development.

The CES results may highlight areas for strengthening your teaching practice. There are a number of resources available to assist you with interpreting your CES results, including:

- The CES Analysis Project:
  http://www.rmit.edu.au/teaching/cesanalysis

- Survey Services Centre (SSC):
  http://www.rmit.edu.au/ssc