Student feedback & the Course Experience Survey

RMIT University has progressively 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
- Learning Resources
- The balance of theory/instruction and practice
- Course interest
- Online – computer based materials
- Overall Student Satisfaction
- Preparedness for the workplace

Additional question items that 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://www1.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.

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

The Head of the School receives a document summarising the results for each 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 name. 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 / international students. These details provide background information against which to interpret the later results. The most important piece of data in this top section is the number of surveys completed. Staff may wish to calculate a percentage response rate to use alongside the total number of survey responses when considering the survey results.

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 75% 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.

Course teams can also make comparisons with program and School aggregated data on the Survey Services Centre site – though this is not available until all course surveys are processed, usually after semester assessment cutoff dates. 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 their response to the student feedback.
Interpreting & informing practice – Technical & Further Education (VE)

Teaching style – Organisation
1. The learning objectives in this course are clear to me
8. My instructors have a thorough knowledge of the course assessment

Do you:

• Understand the competencies and performance criteria from the Training Package competencies relevant to your course?

• Incorporate these competencies and performance criteria into your learning objectives and outcomes?

• Clearly articulate the relationship between course content, learning and teaching resources, key competencies and relevant training packages?

• Align learning objectives, learning outcomes, 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?

Teaching style – Delivery
9. My instructors provide opportunities to ask questions
10. My instructors treat me with respect
12. My instructors communicate the course content effectively
13. My instructors make the course as interesting as possible

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?

• 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?

• Think about how the students engage with your material – do they just sit and listen? Are there 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 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?”
Assessment & feedback

2. Assessment tasks in this course require me to demonstrate what I am learning
3. The amount of work required in this course is about right
11. My instructors understand my learning needs

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 competencies required for the training package under study with appropriate learning objectives, learning outcomes and assessment?

• Do you evaluate the above alignment? If yes, how?

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

• Provide a mark sheet to return with assignments which lists the assessment criteria, competency criteria, and training package criteria so students can see their performance against each criterion and how the overall mark was awarded?

• 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?

• Cross course assess?

• 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, or are you aware of, contemporary teaching and learning assessment/plagiarism support packages such as Turnitin?

Competencies & workplace readiness

5. I can see how this course will help me in the workplace
6. This course prepares me for working in a global and international setting

Do you:

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

• Do you relate the content of your course to a particular training package and/or competencies? Do you relate your content to other courses in the program as appropriate?

• Evaluate your students’ recognition of the alignment between your course content, competency based teaching requirements, and particular training packages? If yes, how!
Resources & facilities

4. The web-based (online) materials for this course are effective in assisting my learning.

Do you:

• Check your slides for accuracy and readability?

• Update your readings regularly? Are your content and teaching tools relevant to your students’ experiences? Are they relevant to particular competencies and training packages that inform your course? Are they up to date? Do you look for new readings each year?

• Is your Blackboard site maintained regularly? Do you know where to go to receive Blackboard training?

• Direct students to relevant external websites?

• Know how to make full use of the technology that is available to you in the classrooms?

• Actively direct students to library and learning support resources as appropriate?

• Use mobile learning techniques to support your teaching style and student learning? For example, podcasts of key course concepts that students find difficult to grasp; Blogs to receive student information and to offer online feedback?

• Present your content around a small number, no more than three, key concepts that are crucial to the course, and/or that previous student evaluations/assessments have highlighted as problematic areas of student learning?

• Use the online learning and teaching support services that are available to ALL academic staff?

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