Interpreting the results of the Course Experience Survey – Higher Ed

Staff are given a three page document summarising the results for each set of survey forms that were 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. Unfortunately this output does not also provide the number of students enrolled in the course. Staff may wish to calculate a percentage response rate to use alongside the total number of survey responses when considering their reaction to the survey results.

The second part of page one gives a summary of responses to the survey items. The survey comprises 21 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 that 50% agreement should give cause for reflection.

The final piece of information on the summary page is the Good Teaching Scale score, comprising items 4, 5, 9, 17, 19 and 20. This gives an overall indication of student satisfaction, and is the same scale used in the program surveys including Student Experience Surveys.

The remaining pages of the document give the results for individual items, including the three 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.
Teaching style: organisation

1. The learning objectives in this course are clear to me
2. I am learning what I expected in this course
3. The course is well organised

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?
- 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?)
- 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 to day?”, “What was the key thing you learnt in the last session?”
- Get feedback from different student groups, for examples, international students, students from different programs?
- Use learning contracts?

Teaching style: delivery

4. The teaching staff are extremely good at explaining things
9. The teaching staff in this course motivate me to do my best work
10. I enjoy doing the work for this course
15. I feel I can actively participate in my classes
17. 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? 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 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?
Assessment and feedback

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

Do you:

- 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 (e.g., 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, 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?
- Cross course assess?
- Sit with (at risk) students and go through the feedback with them?
- 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, and ACKNOWLEDGEMENT?

Capabilities / workplace readiness

6. This course contributes to my confidence in tackling unfamiliar problems
16. There is a good balance between theory and practice
18. I can see how I’ll be able to use what I am learning in this course in my career

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?
- Do you relate the content of your course to other courses in the program / common core as appropriate?

Resources / facilities

11. I find the learning resources for this course useful (e.g., notes, handouts, readings, AV materials)
12. The web based (online) materials for this course are effective in assisting my learning
13. There is effective use of other computer-based teaching materials in this course
14. The facilities (such as classrooms, lecture theatres, studios, labs) are adequate for this course

Do you:

- Check your slides for accuracy and readability?
- Update your readings regularly? Are your content and teaching tools relevant to your students’ experiences, and 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 of Building 108?

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

• Use mobile leaning techniques to support your teaching style and student learning? For example, pod casts 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 in the Business Portfolio through the Business Academic Development Group?

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With input from John Milton, Learning & Teaching Development.

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