

Evaluation Forum 2006

evaluating to improve the student experience

28 - 29 November 2006

Curtin University of Technology



program and
abstracts

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Introduction

As we know, the evaluation of teaching and learning has become a “high stakes” event, particularly since the introduction of two major initiatives—the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund (LTPF) and AUQA audits. While there may be a degree of debate, even disquiet, about the ways in which these initiatives are implemented and reported, since their introduction universities have been galvanised into a flurry of activity.

This is great news for those who work in the area of university evaluation (including the delegates at this conference)! However, unless it means better experiences for students “at the chalkface” (using this term at its broadest to include all modes in which learning occurs, as well as extramural student experiences) then the energy associated with evaluation is wasted.

This Forum focuses on exploiting the new measures, particularly the LTPF, to ensure that student experience is enhanced: papers address a range of issues including methods of evaluation, mining qualitative and quantitative data to find out just what the student is saying, devising ways to retain and engage the student, the issues associated with various modes of data gathering, and how those who work in evaluation might best support university staff.

We trust that the interactions at the Forum, through formal sessions and perhaps even more through informal networking opportunities, will all lead to improving the student experience, for whom acquiring a university education is undoubtedly always a “high stakes” activity.

Dr Beverley Oliver
Forum Convenor

Event Organisers:

Ms Judy Schrape
Ms Terri Crowe

Forum Organising Committee:

Ms Christina Ballantyne, Murdoch University
Dr Allan Goody, University of Western Australia
Ms Sue Jones, Curtin University of Technology
Dr Beverley Oliver, Curtin University of Technology
Dr Pender Pedler, Edith Cowan University
Ms Beatrice Tucker, Curtin University of Technology
Ms Sue van Leeuwen, Notre Dame University
Dr Shelley Yeo, Curtin University of Technology

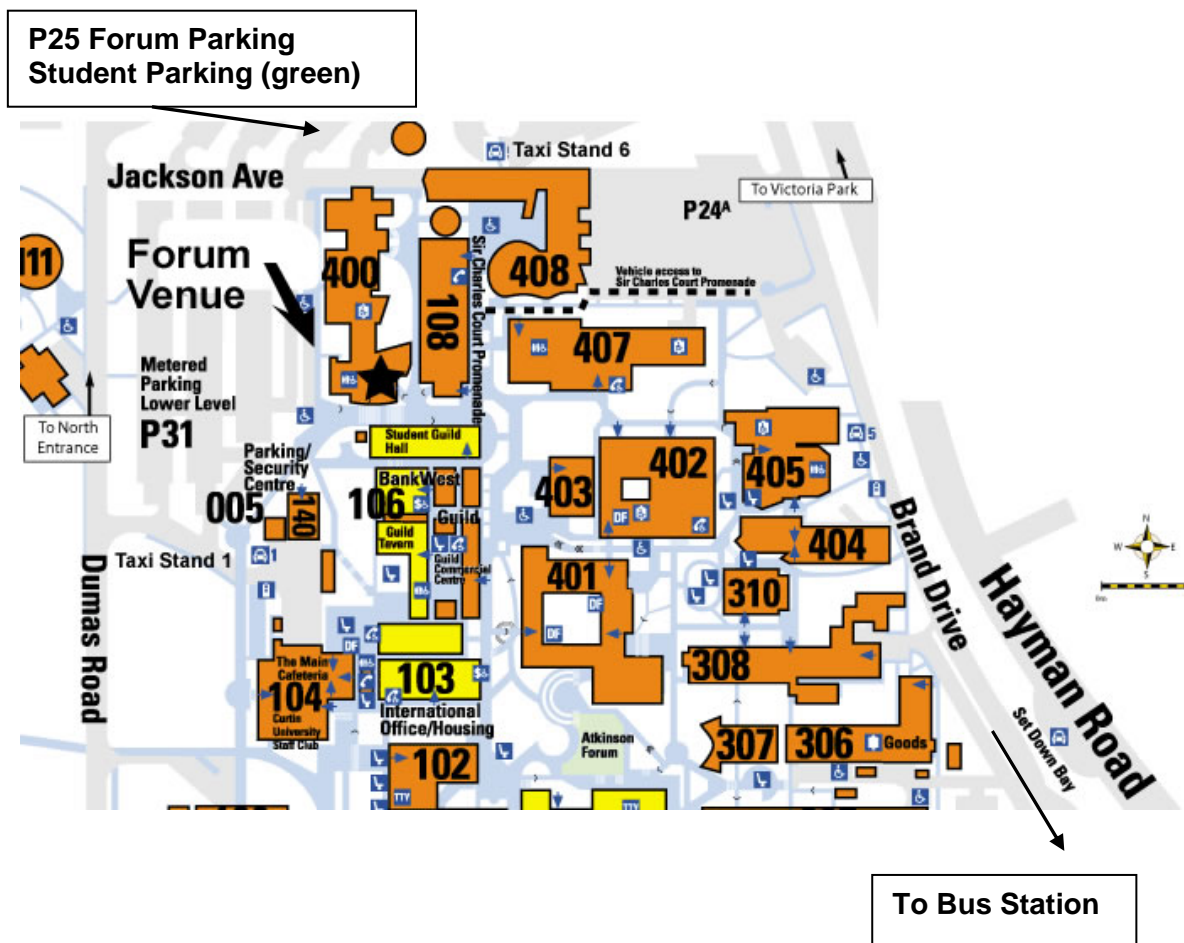
Key information

Forum registration

The registration desk is located in Room 303 on level 1 of Building 400. Delegates can register from 11.30 am on the first day of the Forum.

Forum venue

All sessions at the Forum will be held in Room 305 in Building 400 near the northern end of the Bentley campus.



Parking

Parking is available for Forum participants in car park Student P25. Participants are requested to park in the green parking bays. Please ensure that you park only in the green parking areas as parking regulations are enforced at Curtin during non-teaching times.

Public transport

To and from the airport: An airport shuttle bus travels between the domestic airport and major hotels on a regular basis. Enquire at the airport.

To and from the CBD: You may be best advised to share a taxi. Taxis are readily available and the nearest taxi stands to the forum venue are Taxi Stand 1 and 6 both of which are close to Building 408.

For a Swan Taxi, phone 13 13 30

Alternatively, Curtin Bus Station (at the east end of campus) is the principal pedestrian gateway into the Bentley Campus and is one of the bus stops for Transperth's Circle Route, which facilitates travel around the city fringe between universities, train stations and shopping centres. It runs every 15 minutes between the hours of 6.30am and 6.00pm Monday to Friday.

Refreshments and lunches

Lunch and morning and afternoon teas will be served in 400:303 on both days. For other refreshments, visit Angazi Café near building 408.

Forum dinner

The Forum dinner is included in the registration fee for full registrants and will be held at the Thai Corner Restaurant on Tuesday evening, 28 November with pre-dinner drinks at 6 pm. Transport to the dinner: best options are to arrange a lift with a local person, or to share a taxi. Signup sheets for these options will be available at the registration desk.

Thai Corner Restaurant
893 Canning Hwy (Cnr Sleat Rd)
Applecross 6153 WA
Phone: (08) 9364 3435

Forum evaluation

Feedback is always appreciated during the Forum and there will be a Suggestions Box on the registration table for the duration of the Forum. At the conclusion of the Forum you will be asked to complete the Forum Evaluation Form to assist in planning future forums.

Telephones

Public telephones are located in both Building 407 and Building 408. In case of an emergency, you can dial "5" from any internal phone.

Banking

An ATM is available outside BankWest in Building 408.

Acknowledgments

Our special thanks to:

- our invited speakers and presenters;
- reviewers of papers and abstracts; and
- our LSN staff who provided all the administrative support.

Forum program overview

Plenary sessions

Invited speaker sessions have been scheduled for 60 minutes. There will be time at the end of each presentation for the invited speakers to answer questions.

Paper sessions

Paper sessions have been scheduled for 20 minutes. Chairs for each session will introduce presenters and manage the timing. Presentations should be as interactive as possible. Each paper presenter has been asked to present for no more than 10 minutes allowing 10 minutes of discussion.

Abstracts

Abstracts for all sessions are in chronological order in this booklet.

Papers and abstracts have been made available on the Forum website <http://lsn.curtin.edu.au/evaluationforum06/index.html> prior to the Forum to enable participants to read items of interest before attending the sessions.

Audio Visual

The Forum presentation room is equipped with a computer, data projection, OHP and whiteboards. Presenters should load presentations onto the computer during the break before they present.

Program

Tuesday 28 November - Building 400, Room 303 and 305	
11.30–12.00	Registration
12.00–12.30	Lunch
12.30-12.45	Official Opening - Professor Jane den Hollander , Pro Vice-Chancellor Academic Services, Curtin University of Technology
12.45-2.00	Invited speaker: Professor Geoff Scott , Pro Vice-Chancellor Quality, University of Western Sydney <i>Listening to the student voice: lessons for engaging and retaining students at university</i>
2.00-2.15	Short break
2.15-3.45	<i>Higher Education response to Stage 1 of the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund</i> Edward Palmer and Geoffrey Crisp The University of Adelaide
Chair: Christina Ballantyne	<i>All things considered, what aspects of a staff member's professional repertoire are related to their overall effectiveness as a university teacher?</i> Roberta Martin and Julie Arthur The University of Queensland
	<i>Quality of teaching surveys and the CEQ: Is there method in this madness?</i> Martin Davies, Joe Hirschberg, Jenny Lye and Carol Johnston The University of Melbourne
	<i>Using a mid-course CEQ</i> Pender Pedler Edith Cowan University
3.45-4.15	Refreshments
4.15-5.45	<i>Business process: The king of evaluations</i> Chris Wayland nLIVE Pty Ltd
Chair: Shelley Yeo	<i>A case study of a university transitioning toward reporting learner-based outcomes: Challenges and expectations from the outside</i> Fernando Padró Monmouth University
	<i>Evaluating to improve: The Law Faculty experience</i> Joanna Becker, Chenicheri Sid Nair, Len Webster Monash University
	<i>Promoting excellence in research student supervision: A framework for collecting, organising and using evaluation evidence</i> Duncan Nulty Griffith University
5.45pm +	Pre-dinner drinks and Dinner - Thai Corner Restaurant

Wednesday 29 November - Building 400	
8.45 +	Arrival refreshments
9.00-10.00	Invited speaker: Mr Robert Carmichael , Audit Director, AUQA <i>Learning about Learning and Teaching from AUQA audit findings</i>
10.00-10.40	<i>Analysing qualitative feedback using CEQuery and SPSS Text Analysis for Surveys</i> Beverley Oliver, Beatrice Tucker and Julie-Ann Pegden Curtin University of Technology
Chair: Pender Pedler	<i>What about student comments? Issues related to moving student evaluations online</i> Christina Ballantyne Murdoch University
10.45-11.15	Morning Tea
11.15-12.15	<i>Focus groups as a form of student evaluation of teaching</i> Robert Muller, Carol Collins and Sue Knight University of South Australia
Chair: Sue Jones	<i>How multi-dimensional evaluation of teaching can help improve the student experience</i> Marcia Devlin The University of Melbourne
	<i>Developing an evaluation strategy for development and training activities</i> Deanne Gannaway Flinders University
12.15-1.15	Lunch
1.15-2.45	<i>Putting students in the picture: Student perceptions and expectations of evaluation at the University of New England</i> Cathryn McCormack University of New England
Chair: Beatrice Tucker	<i>Engagement the key to better response rates</i> Chenicheri Sid Nair, Phillip Adams, Stefano Ferraiuolo and Andrew Curtis Monash University
	<i>Optimising the potential of evaluations staff to support institutional research priorities for improving the student experience</i> Clair Hughes and Roberta Martin The University of Queensland
	<i>Adapting to a changing environment: Improving the performance of evaluation services</i> Edward Palmer The University of Adelaide
2.45-3.15	Afternoon Tea
3.15-4.45	Symposium: What are the key issues and where to from here? This will be an opportunity to form interest groups and consolidate ideas and plans which have emerged from the Forum.
4.45	Reflection, evaluation and conclusion

Invited speaker: Professor Geoff Scott

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Quality), University of Western Sydney, Australia



Dr Geoff Scott's specific areas of research and writing are in strategic change management in post-secondary and higher education; quality tracking and improvement in universities; identifying what engages students in productive learning; program innovation and evaluation; assessment of professional capability; studies of effective leadership and the equity implications of the increased use of I.T. in education. He is the author of a wide range of refereed journal articles and his book *Change matters: making a difference in education and training* is widely used in a number of countries.

Currently he is director of the national CEQuery project which created and is now using a new tool for analysing more than 150,000 comments written by Australian graduates on the national higher education course experience questionnaire. He is coordinator of a series of studies of successful graduates in a wide range of professions and has just completed a study of what distinguishes effective school principals.

He is a member of advisory groups to the Federal Minister for Education on quality assurance for Australia's offshore higher education programs and the new \$250 million national learning and teaching performance fund, along with being a member of the national organizing committee for the Australian Universities Quality Forum.

Listening to the student voice: Lessons for engaging and retaining students at university

This session will focus on the key findings which have emerged from the recently completed national *CEQuery* research project¹. In particular it will identify a set of key quality checkpoints for engaging students in productive learning and retaining them, and how *CEQuery* can be used in conjunction with other tracking systems and data to identify improvement priorities and to identify solutions.

A second theme will identify how we can apply the key lessons from 25 years' research on effective change implementation in universities to ensuring that the *CEQuery* tool and its findings are acted upon to improve the total student experience in higher education.

¹ See Scott, G (2006): Accessing the Student Voice: Using *CEQuery* to identify what retains students and promotes engagement in productive learning in Australian higher education
http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/profiles/access_student_voice.htm

Invited speaker: Mr Robert Carmichael

Audit Director, Australian Universities Quality Agency



For ten years Rob was the Head of the Office for Quality Education at Swinburne University of Technology where he was responsible for the initial development, ongoing operation and continual improvement of the Swinburne Quality Management System. Rob also had responsibility for the higher education Subject Evaluation System and the University's annual teaching, research, and service excellence awards program. For years he also ran a quality improvement projects program, and was the institutional contact officer for the annual Quality Assurance & Improvement Plan, CUTSD programs, and the CQAHE quality assurance program. Prior to this Rob worked in the VET sector as a curriculum development specialist, as a teacher, and as an academic manager. He is also a formally qualified Quality Assessor, a trained auditor, a member of the AAIR, and a founding member of the Quality in Education and Training Network in Victoria.

Since joining AUQA in 2002, Rob has been appointed Audit Director for the following audits (year of audit in brackets): University of Canberra ('03); Southern Cross University ('03); ACT Accreditation & Recognition Council ('03); James Cook University and the NSW Department of Education and Training ('04); and the University of Tasmania and the Melbourne College of Divinity ('05). In 2004, Rob chaired the Joint Steering Group for AUQF2004 in Adelaide, and in 2005 he also represented AUQA on the Working Group established by DEST for the auditing of non-self accrediting Higher Education Providers.

Learning about Learning and Teaching from AUQA audit findings

The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) was established with responsibility for auditing Australian universities against their stated missions and goals using a "fitness for purpose" approach based on a self-review portfolio and site visits. Audit reports include commendations for good practice and recommendations for improvement, and more recently affirmations which are a subset of recommendations. To-date all but one of the universities has now been audited.

This paper builds-on and extends work done by Barbara de la Harpe of RMIT and Alex Radloff of CQU in their paper 'Learning from AUQA Commendations' delivered at HERDSA 2006. Radloff and de la Harpe focused on the AUQA audit commendations that related to learning and teaching in order to gain insight into what universities identified as their areas of strength and which were validated by the audit process. They categorised commendations from 24 audit reports using a qualitative approach, to identify six categories of good practice and used these to identify insights for learning and teaching and to suggest how the sector can build on these to further enhance good practice. The author of this paper applied the same methodology to AUQA audit recommendations and affirmations and concludes the paper by drawing out some issues of relevance for institutional evaluation practitioners. For consistency, the same 24 audit reports were used for this part of the study.

The author expressly acknowledges and thanks Alex Radloff and Barbara de la Harpe for their permission to use their research data and information in this paper.

Abstracts (in order of presentation)

Session 1 Tuesday 28 November 2.15 - 3.45 pm

Higher Education response to Stage 1 of the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund

Edward Palmer and Geoffrey Crisp

The University of Adelaide

This paper aims to investigate the response of higher education institutions to stage 1 of the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund, specifically the condition stating “Evidence that student evaluations of subjects are publicly available on the University’s website.” A list of all universities and other self accrediting higher education institutions was obtained from the Australian Government education web site. Each of the web sites hosted by these institutions was visited for information using a pre-determined method. Whilst many universities provide publicly available versions of aggregate information, the definition of ‘publicly’ has been treated rather liberally. The people who may find this information of most use, current and prospective students, have been largely ignored. This paper suggests that universities should provide information on course evaluations not only in a central section but associated with the general course information.

All things considered, what aspects of a staff member's professional repertoire are related to their overall effectiveness as a university teacher?

Roberta Martin and Julie Arthur

The University of Queensland

The evaluation of the effectiveness of learning and teaching in higher education in universities in Australia has traditionally been an area fraught with tensions. Student surveys were introduced in Australian universities in the early 1990s and until the introduction of the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund (LTPF), information collected was, in most cases, only provided to staff members with a view to improving the quality of teaching of subjects or programs. Institutional surveys have a standard set of items related to various aspects of the teaching and learning experience with a final item rating the academic staff member. This research, which involved statistical analysis of aggregated data, investigated which of the standard items were most related to the overall ranking assigned to staff members by the student survey cohort. At an individual level the findings guide academic staff to target improvements in areas most strongly related to the overall satisfaction ranking. At the institutional level, the results lead the way for an evidence-based approach to academic staff development, policy development and the implementation of strategic initiatives in the scholarship of learning and teaching. This paper reflects on the challenges of quality assurance and enhancement of learning and teaching. Formal accountability processes and academic engagement with student feedback are explored. Furthermore the paper discusses the implications of the elevation and adoption of student data as a quality measure of corporate performance, given the diversity of the learning and teaching provision across faculties and programs.

Quality of teaching surveys and the CEQ: Is there method in this madness?

Martin Davies, Joe Hirschberg, Jenny Lye and Carol Johnston

The University of Melbourne

All tertiary institutions in Australia use the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ); however for the internal evaluation of teaching they use their own surveys. This paper is the first attempt to perform an analysis of the internal teaching surveys used in all Australian universities by investigating how they compare to the CEQ and other characteristics of the universities. We categorize the questions on each survey into one of 19 different possible types and use this classification of the questions to define a measure of the similarity of these surveys to each other and to the CEQ. By the use of an agglomerative cluster analysis we then establish groupings of these institutions on the basis of the similarity of their questionnaires. In addition, we determine if the other characteristics of the universities influence the types of questions asked on each institution's survey using a regression analysis.

Using a mid-course CEQ

Pender Pedler

Edith Cowan University

The Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) is becoming increasingly important in processes and systems assuring the quality of learning and teaching (L&T) outcomes. In addition to its use in monitoring, reviewing and evaluating course outcomes, CEQ data are now used in institutional and national funding models. At the institutional level, some universities use CEQ data as a proxy for quality in a performance-based budget pool to provide a financial reward to those schools identified for the quality of their L&T outcomes. At the national level, the DEST Learning and Teaching Performance Fund (LTPF) uses CEQ data as an indicator of the excellence of L&T outcomes when identifying and rewarding those institutions with higher levels of demonstrated excellence. University staff are now under increasing pressure to improve the CEQ outcomes of their courses. The principal means of achieving this is for staff to systematically diagnose and rectify all issues concerning student perceptions of their course experiences, in time for changes to be made before course completion. Neither CEQ data nor internal unit and teaching evaluation data is adequate for this purpose. In 2004 ECU developed and trialled a mid-course CEQ. Following the trial, the University endorsed the mid-course CEQ as an approved form of quality assurance for L&T across a course. In 2005, 22 mid-course CEQs were conducted by five schools in three faculties, generating 35 mid-course CEQ reports. The mid-course CEQ is now an important university tool for diagnosing and rectifying problems with course delivery.

Business process: The king of evaluations

Chris Wayland

nLIVEn Pty Ltd

The focus in the higher education sector on the development of multi-faceted applications and systems to enable evaluations over the past few years has seen many different approaches taken. The increased use of web-based surveys as opposed to paper-based surveys has led to the need for complex systems which support the integration of the survey tool with Student Management Systems and reporting systems to ensure all relevant information is captured and reported. The development of thorough documentation and re-engineering of the business processes is the key to any efficient, effective and sustainable technology solution. Most people and organisations too quickly rush into choosing a technology solution before considering the key question – What is the technology enabling? This has led to the failure of systems or severe shortcomings such as the system matching the business needs. It has become abundantly clear that the BUSINESS PROCESS is the key to successful, efficient and robust evaluation systems and not just the system! This session will explore a case study where business process was the key driver of the design and implementation of the system for evaluations for both paper and web based surveys (both institutional and national) at Monash University not the technology solution.

A case study of a university transitioning toward reporting learner-based outcomes: Challenges and expectations from the outside

Fernando Padró

Monmouth University

This is a study of what an American university reported as part of its accreditation review, specifically mandating the use of learner-based outcome data. The move towards the use of learner outcomes assessment within accreditation is recent and still developing. The analysis is done in light of a comparison with Australia's approach toward collecting learner data through surveys such as the CEQ. Learner data provided in the accreditation Portfolio is scant, demonstrating the difficulties in transitioning to a continuous improvement approach toward accreditation review and the identification of appropriate metrics, data collection, and use of the data as a proxy for quality. Throughout the narrative, issues surrounding the development and use of learner data are explored. Three major points of consideration are posited which become the bases for presenting concerns shared by developing systems such as those found in the USA and mature national quality assurance processes such as those used in Australia.

Evaluating to improve: The Law Faculty experience**Joanna Becker, Chenicheri Sid Nair, Len Webster**

Monash University

Currently, Australian universities participate in a range of quality reviews in which they are required to demonstrate that they have clear processes and procedures in place to ensure quality for their students. One way in which many universities have approached the process of meeting the quality needs of their students is through the implementation of a regular student experience evaluation process. At Monash University, the importance of an ongoing and systematic student experience evaluation process and the value of the feedback gained from this process have been highlighted in a number of forums, including the 2002 Monash University Self-review report *Still Learning: The Report of our Self Review*. This paper presents a case study on how the Faculty of Law at Monash University has approached using this student experience questionnaire.

Promoting excellence in research student supervision: A framework for collecting, organising and using evaluation evidence**Duncan Nulty**

Griffith University

One issue universities face is the need to demonstrate excellence in postgraduate research supervision. Currently, the amount and range of evidence of supervisory excellence tends to be minimal, leaving supervisors, faculties and institutions in a position where demonstrating excellence is difficult. In this discussion paper, we propose two inter-dependent ideas, which considered together, promise to go a long way toward solving this problem. The first is a framework for the collection and use of evidence of supervisory excellence. The second is a template for a supervisory excellence report. The framework details the organisational elements, uses of data, and data types which can be considered. The report explains one simple, but potent, way to organise and present the data for multiple purposes.

Analysing qualitative feedback using CEQuery and SPSS Text Analysis for Surveys

Beverley Oliver, Beatrice Tucker and Julie-Ann Pegden

Curtin University of Technology

Curtin's new online student evaluation system (*eVALUate*) provides analysis of quantitative and qualitative data which is reported at unit, course, divisional and university level. This study examines the relationship between the students' written comments and their level of satisfaction with the quantitative items in the unit level survey. CEQuery was used to sort qualitative comments into domains and subdomains, and SPSS Text Analysis for Surveys was used to examine major themes and connections within each subdomain. Of the 25090 responses collected at the end of semester 1 2006, 67.4% contained at least one comment. More students commented on the item about 'Most helpful aspects' (59.6%) than 'How units might be improved' (58%). A higher number of surveys were submitted by female students (female=69.4%; male=64.6%), older students, Australian students (Australian=71.3%; International=57.5%), full-time students (full-time=68%; part-time=65.3%) and those who were enrolled externally (external=73.6%; internal=67.1%). On average, student comments were lengthier for the item on improving the unit (181 characters). Students commented most frequently about methods of teaching and learning in the item on 'Most helpful aspects' however this was also the second most frequent comment in the item on 'How the unit might be improved.' SPSS text analysis identified common themes that helped identify what methods of teaching and learning were helping students learn. This analysis was conducted for the university report and the divisional report so any differences could be determined.

What about student comments? Issues related to moving student evaluations online

Christina Ballantyne

Murdoch University

In 2005 Murdoch University moved its student survey of units system completely online. Overall this has been a successful exercise with both staff and students responding well to the online system. One of the questions raised by the move to online surveys concerns the use of student comments and whether comments have changed now that they are online. Research shows that students generally give longer and more thoughtful comments online. While a comparison of online and paper comments in unit surveys is not possible given that in the past paper forms were returned to the unit co-ordinator and comments not recorded, other surveys conducted both online and on paper (Murdoch's Whole of University Experience Survey, Course Experience Questionnaire) provide data showing quantitative differences in student comments in the two modes. The views of teaching staff on their perception of the differences in comments in the two modes with regard to unit surveys are presented. Moving to online surveys also raises the question of how we deal with student comments now that they are electronically recorded. Who owns the information? What are the issues if comments are distributed more widely than was possible when on paper? What if we want to use them for research? This presentation will consider these questions and how the administrators of the surveys might help prevent the misuse of student comments.

Focus groups as a form of student evaluation of teaching

Robert Muller, Carol Collins and Sue Knight

University of South Australia

This paper will fill a gap in the scholarship of teaching and learning on focus groups as a form of student evaluation of teaching. This 'gap' may be due to the fact that focus groups are seen as an unofficial form of evaluation in a system which emphasises Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs) and the Course Evaluation Instrument (CEI). They are also seen as an adjunct to these more formal types of evaluation, to gain deeper understandings of student opinions. Despite the unofficial and adjunct status of focus groups, this form of student evaluation needs to be theorised and considered in the literature. Staff who request focus groups, often do so after checking their SETs and CEI scores. They often take the negative comments to heart, without placing enough emphasis on the positives. The amount of perceived negative comments from large course groups, sometimes up to 300 students per study period, often overwhelms academic staff and they find it difficult to establish a starting point from which to begin to improve their course or their teaching. Focus groups provide the opportunity to delve deeper into the reasons why students may be satisfied or dissatisfied with a particular course. Focus groups also place some measure of accountability upon students to justify their evaluations of teaching and courses. For this reason, focus groups are a valuable form of evaluation, thus needing to be theorised and considered seriously in the literature. Until now, this has not been the case.

How multi-dimensional evaluation of teaching can help improve the student experience

Marcia Devlin

The University of Melbourne

The single-item teaching quality measures commonly used in Australian higher education offer little opportunity for teaching improvement, nor for enhancing the student learning experience. Typically, in student evaluation of teaching, students' strength of agreement with a statement such as 'This subject was well taught' are sought using a 5-point Likert scale and the responses of a cohort averaged and fed back to lecturers. If the average is high, lecturers often do not know exactly what it is they are doing that leads to this positive view. Similarly, if the average is low, most lecturers have no information about how, specifically, to improve their teaching. This paper reports on a small study in an Australian university using a multi-dimensional measure of teaching effectiveness that provides specific, detailed information about several aspects of teaching to lecturers. This information includes student evaluation and self-evaluation of teaching using a multi-dimensional instrument. The ways in which this information was subsequently used to successfully target areas of teaching for improvement is outlined. The impacts of an intervention guided by this feedback information are examined with the use of a control group who receive equivalent feedback but no development program. The implications for practice in evaluating teaching and in academic development are discussed.

Developing an evaluation strategy for development and training activities

Deanne Gannaway
Flinders University

Surveys of evaluation practices in relation to educational development programmes showed that despite the majority of developers considering the conduct of systematic evaluation as integral to their activities, few activities were evaluated in a systematic fashion. This paper describes a project designed to develop a consistent, systematic evaluation and review procedure for university professional development, education and training activities. This project sought to develop a process that had a limited demand on resources such as administration time, yet still provided sufficient information that would support informed value judgements about professional development activities. To do this, a matrix was developed that comprised an overview of the evaluation strategies currently practiced in the Staff Development and Training Unit, identifying important gaps. Information and tools were sought to address these gaps, which would gather data via multileveled strategies and from multiple sources. The matrix was then used to conduct a critical review of development activities to categorise them into bands that signified the level of evaluation that would benefit future planning. This categorisation of activities into bands assisted in the development and refinement of a set of recommended evaluation strategies.

Putting students in the picture: Student perceptions and expectations of evaluation at the University of New England

Cathryn McCormack

University of New England

Student evaluation of lecturer performance and units or subjects has been widely used in Australian universities for many years to gather data for institutional purposes. However, a scan of policies and processes published in various Australian university websites reveals students are rarely mentioned outside of the data collection process. Likewise, the literature focuses more on validity and reliability of data than on involving students. Given this, the current study is being undertaken to investigate student perceptions of UNE's existing evaluation processes and their expectations of future involvement, such as, but not limited to, receiving feedback on changes made as a result of the evaluation survey. Data collection is currently in process. Semi-structured focus group discussions will be held with approximately 40 students. As communication between students and staff varies significantly by delivery mode, the groups are divided by four delivery modes: on-campus, off-campus regularly attending residential schools (RRS), off-campus rarely attending residential schools (NRS), and online. Interestingly, initial results show that off-campus RRS students are unaware of our current processes including confidentiality issues. Further data analysis hopes to establish a basis for recommendations on policy, process and presentation of data so that students and the institution derive greater benefit from evaluation.

Engagement the key to better response rates

Chenicheri Sid Nair, Phillip Adams, Stefano Ferraiuolo and Andrew Curtis

Monash University

Monash University has experienced a steady decline in its response rate to the Graduate Destination Survey (GDS) and Course Experience Survey (CEQ) since the late 1990's. In 2005, Monash posted an all-time low in its response rate of 36.6% for the GDS and 26.5% for the CEQ. With much riding for Monash, in January 2006, a review of the process was undertaken that resulted in changing strategies so as to improve response rates. For any evaluation data to be of value an important prerequisite is that response rates are sufficiently high to be representative of the student cohort. With results from evaluations playing an increasingly critical role in quality assurance and improvement activities in Australian universities, there is increasingly mounting pressure to better response rates, if not to simply maintain survey response rates. Drawing from the changes made to the collection of data for the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) at Monash, this paper provides practical applications that promote an increase in participation rates. The results show that student engagement and the need to recognize the needs of the cohort surveyed are some of the key elements needed to achieve effective participation of non respondents. The end product of this exercise is that response rates for the CEQ have increased by 100% to just over 53% with GDS responses increasing by 50% to approximately 55%.

Optimising the potential of evaluations staff to support institutional research priorities for improving the student experience

Clair Hughes and Roberta Martin
The University of Queensland

At The University of Queensland (UQ) and elsewhere, institutional evaluation services typically focus on the collection, analysis and reporting of various measures of student satisfaction with aspects of their learning experience. While such services are essential to a number of institutional quality enhancement and assurance processes, to restrict the activities of evaluation units to such standard services is to overlook their potential to contribute to other institutional research priorities for improving the student experience. This presentation reports on a productive collaboration between academic and evaluation staff at the UQ Teaching and Educational Development Institute (TEDI) when developing a case study based on the evaluation of a first-year architecture design studio from the perspective of Learning Community. The mixed-method evaluation design incorporated consultation with lecturers, studio observation of student learning behaviours, student survey and student focus groups. An aim of the student survey was to allow benchmarking against university-wide data for the CEQ Learning Community Scale. This paper discusses the evaluation staff contributions to the project: survey development, quantitative and qualitative data analysis and assistance in the design of discussion prompts for the focus groups. It is argued that this collaboration resulted in long-term and immediate benefits for both the academic and evaluation staff members alike. In conclusion, emerging issues of relevance to the involvement of evaluation staff in collaborative activities are identified.

Adapting to a changing environment: Improving the performance of evaluation services

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The introduction of the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund has generated great interest in evaluating teaching and learning at all levels in the Higher Education system. At the University of Adelaide, this has manifested itself by staff increasing the amount of surveys measuring the student experience, with ongoing ramifications for the workload of evaluation staff. Data from 2004 to 2006 was examined, looking for changes in the evaluation processes of staff. Since semester 1 2004, there has been an increase of 47% in the number of student experience surveys carried out by staff. The initial outcome of this increase was the increase in turnaround time for reporting from 11 days to 29 days despite the number of surveys processed per day increasing from 48 to 70. In order to respond to this challenging increase in workload, new survey forms were designed, new equipment was purchased and new processes were introduced. The outcome as measured in semester 1, 2006 was a turnaround time reduced to 6 days and an increase in the number of surveys processed per day to 200. Staff had the choice of standard teacher and course surveys, extended versions of these where they were able to add up to 5 additional questions and specially designed surveys. The latter require substantial effort from all parties concerned, but often provided information unlikely to be gleaned from standard survey instruments. The increase in survey usage was equally distributed across most survey types, but there was a significant drop in the number of extended teacher surveys carried out. There was no difference observed in the number of student responses per survey.