

2013 Short Course Student Feedback- Executive Summary



Introduction

During 2013 fifty eight semester and short courses were run covering a diverse range of topics, almost half (25) being new courses, offered in many instances by tutors new to our program. Student Feedback was provided on 32 courses, 13 of which were new, thereby covering half of all new courses.

264 students gave written feedback- being 54% of the 493 students enrolled in the 32 participating short courses. Given the inevitable drop-outs, the number of returns represent 82% of the average course attendance overall and a higher 86% of last day attendance. This provides a relatively sound basis for interpretation and conclusions.

Findings

Course Delivery. Based on key findings from prior analyses, students were asked to rate and comment on their enjoyment of the course and various aspects of how it was run. With the exception of course length, all aspects received very high ratings.

- Students strongly agreed that the course was **enjoyable** (93%), commenting that the tutor's insights and passion, as well as the group discussion, contributed greatly to their enjoyment.
- A similar percent found the course **stimulating** (93%), with the range of materials and questions posed challenging them to engage more with the topic.
- However only 65% strongly agreed that the course was **the right length**, with some students commenting it needed to be longer given the amount of material to cover, skills to be learned and their enjoyment of the course.

In terms of how the course was run, feedback affirmed the inclusiveness and professionalism of the tutors approach.

- 95% strongly agreed that the course had **a friendly and supportive atmosphere**, commenting on the tutor's support and encouragement to members and the rapport developed between students.
- Correspondingly 94% stated that **student participation & interaction was encouraged** by the tutor in regards questions and discussion, and in some instances interaction beyond the classroom.
- 93% students strongly agreed that **sessions** were **well organised**, with **high quality content** (93%), and **clear and interesting presentation** (92%).
- Students valued the tutor's attention to information and activities that would engage and extend them, with 86% strongly agreeing that **useful learning resources and activities** were provided. Students commented positively on additional class resources such as handouts, audio-visual materials, additional references including links for further study.

Suggested Changes. Asked to suggest changes to **the content or delivery of the course**, only 60% responded. Of these many students indicated that no change was required, commenting on the excellence of the course as delivered.

Where change was suggested, the majority of responses related to course or session length, with many members wanting a longer or more in depth course. Others suggested topics in related areas for inclusion.

In several instances suggestions related to different venues or class size, the need to cater for different skill levels, and better management of disruptive class members..

Course outcomes and benefits. Students were asked to indicate **what they got out of attending the course**, 86% responded circling at least one nominated outcome.

The vast majority (80%) stated they gained considerable **knowledge** and understanding of the subject area and a further 36% nominated the **skills** acquired.

- ❖ *"Further appreciation of the French language, improved my general knowledge, musical knowledge and sense of history"*
- ❖ *"Cross reference of skills i.e. sourcing material etc."*

Fifty-eight percent noted their **inspiration and motivation** to explore the topic/practice further; others the **social benefits** of the course (42%), their enhanced **health and wellbeing** (27%), and **confidence** (32%).

- ❖ *"Motivation to continue learning, questioning how science works"*
- ❖ *"I feel younger, that my brain is more active and sharper than ever in learning as well as problem solving"*
- ❖ *"I enjoy and appreciate very much the contributions and friendship of everyone in the class"*

General comments. In commenting on the **course overall or our program generally**, many students praised the excellence of the short course program: the commitment and quality of tutors; the diversity and importance of short courses.

- ❖ *"I am impressed by the breadth of knowledge among the members of U3A Melbourne City and the dedication of all the Tutors I have been fortunate to meet. And the ever increasing range of courses being provided is wonderful. I am very impressed by the skill of all the Tutors I have participated with and by their generosity in volunteering their expertise."*

A number reiterated their desire for follow-up courses and the need for more courses in certain areas, especially in music, literature, science, travel and the arts.

Others noted the value of belonging to U3a Melbourne City and the excellence of the program overall. Some expressed appreciation at being able to access this wonderful resource.

- ❖ *"I joined (U3A) in February 2013 and it has changed my whole attitude to living in Melbourne. Wonderful activities, wonderful companions"*

Conclusions: The overwhelmingly positive responses from participating students indicates the short course program is well run, meeting members educational and social needs, and is highly valued. The key findings are consistent with the 2012 and 2011 findings, reflecting a continued high educational standard in line with practices that support mature age learning.

Without the commitment, knowledge and passion of the volunteer tutors these benefits would not be possible and that acknowledgement is also evident in students' responses. There is strong support for the growth and diversity of the short courses program, and useful suggestions on topic areas that can be expanded or introduced in the future.

Julie Nankervis & Ann Johns, Course Coordination Team