

2014 Short Course Student Feedback- Executive Summary



"The U3A Course Program is excellent. There are courses for the many different interests of our members and it is great to meet people with similar interests to your own in the classes offered"

Introduction

During 2014 written feedback was sought from students in all 58 courses comprising the short course program, 30 of which were offered for the first time. Members were electronically surveyed, via *Survey Monkey*, about their experiences and views of the course attended. In all 470 students provided feedback, representing 69% of all enrolled students with email. This number included 67 students who had withdrawn prior to the last class, their participation being enabled by the introduction of an electronic survey in 2014.

Findings

Student Expectations and Outcomes from attending the course:

Students indicated that they enrolled in the particular course predominantly because they had a general interest in the topic area (72%), wanted to deepen their skills and knowledge in that area (66%) or it was relevant to a specific goal they had (27%). Others chose the course because the scheduled time also suited (27%), while some were also motivated by the tutors reputation (21%) or a desire to try something new (16%).

With few exceptions students reported that the course met or exceeded their expectations (86%). Asked specifically what they got out of attending the course, the vast majority of students (91%) nominated the knowledge gained in the subject area as the most important outcome, with 38% also identifying skills acquired. Motivation/inspiration was also noted by just over half (52%) as a significant benefit, while a nearly a third (30%) specified the companionship derived from their course participation.

Course Delivery:

These benefits to students clearly stemmed from the quality of the program delivered by individual tutors. Across many questions in the survey, students commented on the knowledge, passion and professionalism of their tutor which they greatly appreciated.

The enthusiasm of the Tutor. The skill he employed to explain and unpack the material. Engaging and interesting style which revealed a wide knowledge of the field.

In rating specific aspects of course delivery, students strongly endorsed the tutor's approach in providing a supportive and friendly atmosphere for learning (91%), and encouraging student participation and interaction (81%) that fostered their engagement within the class and beyond.

Students strongly agreed that sessions were well organised (83%), contained relevant course content (88%), which was presented in a clear and interesting way (86%). They valued the inclusion of useful class activities and resources (72%) which provided variety, enhanced learning and enabled later reference and study on the topic.

There was again less agreement about the course length, with a third indicating a preference for a longer course to further explore the topic or consolidate the skills involved. However 64% strongly thought that the course length was the right length.

Students who "dropped-out":

Included for the first time were students who had dropped-out of the course before the end, comprising 14% of respondents. While there was some suggestion that their expectations were less well met, and that they were less satisfied with certain aspects of course delivery than other students, these factors were seldom mentioned as a reason for not completing their course. Health issues, unexpected or other competing personal and family commitments accounted for the vast majority of reasons given by members for dropping out. Only 13% cited reasons relating to course level suitability or specific dissatisfaction.

Course suggestions and general comments:

Across several questions students reiterated their desire for an extension of the current course to broaden the material covered or to enable a more in-depth study of the area. Asked for suggestions of new courses, there was a strong interest in literature and poetry, history, managing digital photos, Smart technology, art appreciation and health related courses.

In commenting on our course program overall, students praised the excellence and diversity of the courses, the affordability of attendance, a preference for short courses, and great appreciation of tutors and other volunteers whose contribution makes it possible.

"Melbourne U3A have an amazing range of interesting courses, with excellent, committed tutors. I really appreciate all the hard work and dedication of the volunteers for this achievement over so many years. Without them it wouldn't happen."

Conclusions: These highly positive responses indicate that the 2014 short course program was well run along lines that support learning for mature age students. The educational and social goals of the program were well met and the provision of short courses is highly valued by members.

While individual tutors have received their specific course feedback, the overall themes provide useful information for general professional development and tutor support. The various suggestions made about new topics or extending existing courses, also provide guidance to the Course Coordination Team in further development of the program.

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