

2015 Short Course Student Feedback- Executive Summary



"The selection of courses is excellent. I have enjoyed each one I have attended, not only for the content but also to enjoy and benefit from the interaction with other class members."

Introduction

During 2015 written feedback was sought from students attending the 46 new courses in the short course program, 35 of which were offered by new tutors. Members were electronically surveyed, via *Survey Monkey*, about their experiences and views of the course attended. In all 375 students provided feedback, representing 72% of enrolled students with email. This number included 55 students who had withdrawn prior to the last class, their participation being enabled by the use of electronic survey.

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 (78%), wanted to deepen their skills and knowledge in that area (58%) or it was relevant to a specific goal they had (24%). Others chose the course because the scheduled time particularly suited (30%), while some were also motivated by the tutors reputation (14%) or a desire to try something new (19%).

The vast majority of students reported that the course met very well or exceeded their expectations (81%). Asked specifically what they got out of attending the course, the students overwhelmingly (90%) nominated the knowledge gained in the subject area as the most important outcome, with 30% also identifying skills acquired. Motivation/inspiration was also noted by half (50%) as a significant benefit, while over a third (35%) 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, further evidenced by 92% strongly endorsing the tutors knowledge and enthusiasm when specifically rated.

"The tutor is knowledgeable and passionate about the subject matter, and a very competent teacher who is able to create a friendly atmosphere in which each student feels valued and inspired to contribute to the best of their ability."

In rating specific aspects of course delivery, students strongly endorsed the tutor's approach in providing a supportive and friendly atmosphere for learning (90%), and encouraging student participation and interaction (78%) that fostered their engagement within the class and beyond.

Students strongly agreed that sessions were well organised (82%), contained relevant course content (87%), which was presented in a clear and interesting way (83%). They valued the inclusion of useful class activities and resources (71%) which provided variety, enhanced learning and enabled later reference and study on the topic.

There was overall 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":

Students who had dropped-out of the course before the end comprised 15% 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 12 students cited matters 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 appreciation and practice of Arts subjects, various sciences, Smart technologies and health/exercise related courses.

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

"The overall course program is amazingly diverse already- what a wonderful organisation to offer so much to so many of us. Thank you to all the volunteers that make it possible".

Conclusions: These highly positive responses indicate that new courses added to the 2015 short course program were well run along lines that support learning for mature age students. This fostered the educational and social goals of the program being met, and the provision of short courses is highly valued by members.

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

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