

2014 Short Course Student Feedback Final Report - March 2015

*Ann Johns & Julie Nankervis
Course Coordination Team*

Summary Findings

During 2014 written feedback was sought from students in all 58 courses comprising the short course program. Members were electronically surveyed, with 470 students providing feedback, representing 69% of all enrolled students with email. As in previous years the feedback was very positive about the running of their course and the benefits derived.

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 specific goal they had (27%). With few exceptions the course met or exceeded their expectations (86%).

Students reported significant benefits from their participation in 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.

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.

In rating specific aspects of course delivery, students strongly endorsed the tutor's providing a supportive and friendly atmosphere for learning (91%), and relevant course content (88%), that was presented in a clear and interesting way (86%). They highly rated sessions as well-organised (83%), with useful activities and resources included (72%) which enhanced learning and enabled later reference and study.

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.

Included for the first time in the feedback survey 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 they were less satisfied with certain aspects of course delivery, this was not stated as the basis of their not completing the course. Health issues, unexpected or other competing 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.

As such, we can conclude 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 demonstrably well met and the provision of short courses is highly valued by members. Various suggestions were made about new topics or extending existing courses, thereby providing guidance to the Course Coordination Team in further development of the program.

Introduction

Providing a high quality, diverse and stimulating education program for members is central to our U3A mission. Thus in 2010, U3A Melbourne City introduced a policy of written student feedback to enable students to comment formally on their experiences of courses attended, and to provide useful information to tutors and coordinators for planning and delivery of future courses.

Since 2011 the focus for student feedback has been our short course program which has accounted for most of the new courses on offer. During 2014, fifty-eight short courses were run, with over half (30) of these being new courses and offered by new tutors in 14 instances. In contrast to prior years, all short courses were surveyed with students again providing feedback on a voluntary basis. This report documents their perceptions and comments.

Implementation

2014 saw the introduction of electronic feedback which enabled the inclusion of students who did not attend the last class, easier data analysis and quicker reporting to individual tutors on completion of their course throughout the year. An email including a direct link to the feedback form on *Survey Monkey* sent to all students who had an email address (86% enrolled students). The survey contained both open and closed questions that asked about students' motivation and benefits of attendance; about what they enjoyed most and their perceptions of how well the course was run; reasons for not completing the course; any suggested changes; ideas for new courses and general comments on our program.

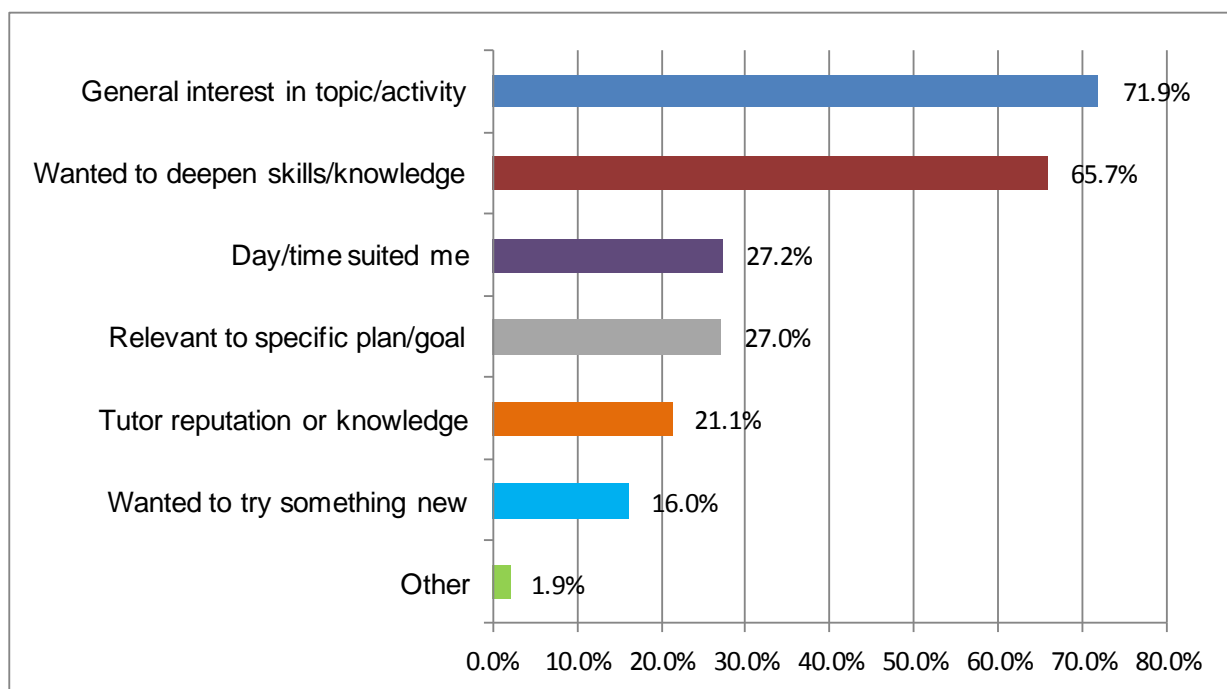
Feedback was received from 470 students, 40% of whom chose to respond anonymously. As such comment was provided by 59% of the total enrolment in our short course program, and a higher 69% of the 681 enrolled students with email. This participation rate provides a relatively sound basis for analysis and interpretation. Included in this response were 67 students (14%) who had

withdrawn from the course prior to the last session, enabling a better understanding of the student drop-out phenomenon.

Key Findings

Reasons for enrolling in their course

At the outset, students were asked (Q2) why they enrolled in their particular course, with most nominating two or more reasons.



As can be seen from the graph above the majority of students enrolled in their course because they were generally interested in the topic or activity covered (72%), or they wanted to deepen their skills/knowledge in the topic area (66%)

General Interest

- *"I'm particularly interested in the history of the Aborigines since white settlement and in Australian history in general." (Frontier Wars)*
- *"My husband is a Bridge player and so are a number of our friends. I finally felt that I had the time & inclination & the perfect opportunity to learn." (Bridge for Beginners)*
- *"I moved to Melbourne 4 years ago so know little about my neighbourhood. I am very interested in both iconic modern architecture and historical heritage buildings." (Architectural Heritage Walks)*

Wanted to deepen skills/knowledge in a particular topic area

- *"Take some complementary medicines and wanted to know more about their regulation and effectiveness" (Complementary Medicine)*
- *"I like taking photographs but I am often disappointed the photos I take. I wanted to learn some tricks and skills to take good photos even for beginners like me." (Digital Photography)*
- *Having had a grandfather who fought in WW1 I wanted to learn more (August 1914)*

- *"I have been learning Italian for a few years, and like most language learners, need more conversation practice" (Italian Conversation- Intermediate)*

A sizable number of students enrolled in their course because it was relevant to a specific plan/goal they had (27%) or its scheduled time was right for them (27%).

Relevant to a specific plan/goal

- *"I wanted the body to become more flexible and to alleviate some back pain." (Yoga for Seniors)*
- *"I am currently studying Norwegian and was interested to improve my study technique." (Learning a foreign language)*
- *"Wanted to learn more about the iPhone and how to use it effectively before buying it" (Using an iPad/iPhone).*
- *"Am interested in travelling to India at some time in future. Wanted to expand knowledge of India and learn some words of Hindi." (Know Hindi to Know Indian Culture)*

Day/time particularly suited

- *"The time Monday 1pm is most suitable for me" (Poetry of the First World War)*
- *"It covered my favourite era and genre in English Literature, and at a convenient location and time." (English Romantic Poetry)*

The tutor's reputation or knowledge of the tutor from attending previous courses was important for 21% of students. Trying something new was a factor for a smaller group (16%)

Tutor reputation

- *"I have been a member of this tutors classes from the very beginning when he taught Theatre through the Ages, followed by a study of Poetry through the Ages. The tutor's love and profound knowledge of the material presented makes all his classes a great experience.(Poetry across the centuries)*
- *"This tutor's courses are always interesting. He's well prepared, flexible with an inclusive and engaging manner. I will continue to enrol with his programs." (Democracy & War)*

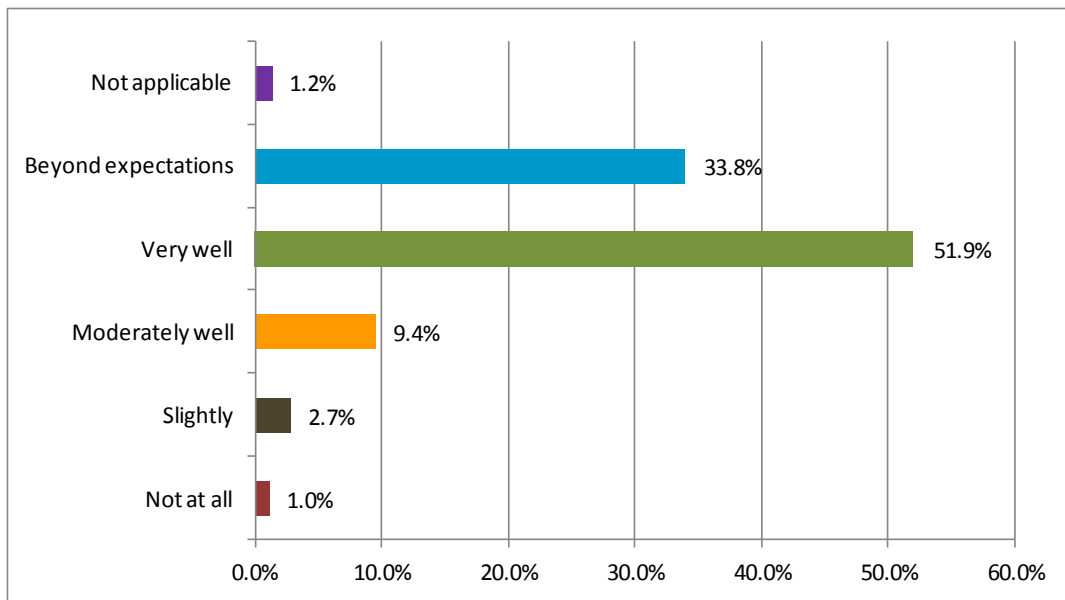
Wanted to try something new

- *"I wanted a brief introduction to both the language and the culture of Spanish speaking countries to see if I would continue to a more detailed study of the language" (Intro to Spanish)*
- *"Always like to learn how things work & description suggested it would be accessible to those without scientific background" (Physics of Sound & Music)*

Considering the enrolment reasons given by students who dropped out of a course to those completing the course, factors such as the scheduled time (33% : 26%) and wanting to try something new (21% : 15%) seem slightly more important to the former group. In contrast, a wish to deepen skills/knowledge (53% : 68%) or work towards a specific plan/goal (18% : 29%) were perhaps less motivating factors. The importance of a general interest in the topic and the tutors reputation were similar for both groups.

How well their course met student's expectations

Given their various reasons for joining the course, students were asked (Q5) how well it met their expectations. Overall 88% students responded, giving high endorsement to the course attended.

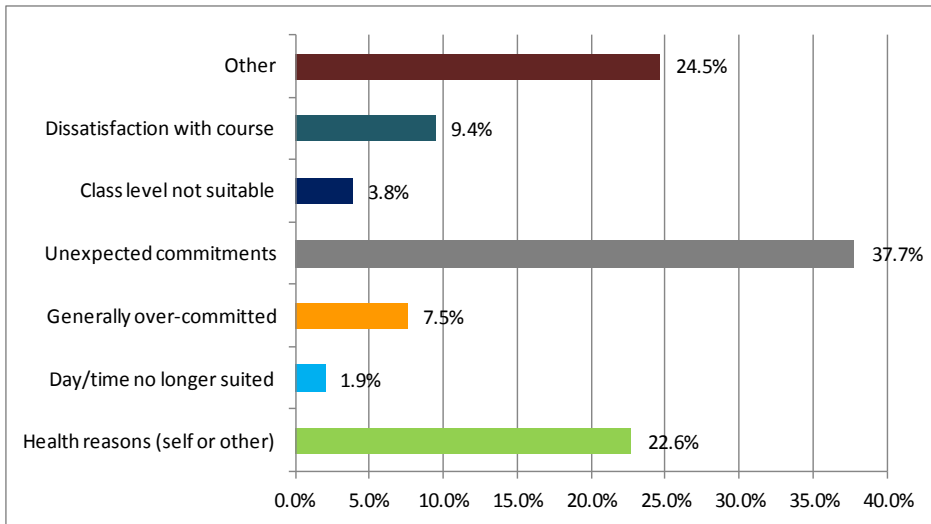


A combined 86% of these stated that the course *met very well* or *went beyond* their expectations. A further 9% indicated it matched their expectations moderately well, with only 4% giving it a lesser rating.

Comparing the ratings of students who had completed the course with those withdrawing along the way, there is some indication that the expectations of the latter group were less well met. While numbers are relatively small (n=66), only 55% of "dropouts" reported the course met their expectations "very well" or "beyond" compared with 90% of completing students. They were more likely to give a "moderately well" rating (23%), "slightly" (9%) or "not at all" (8%)

Reasons given for dropping out of the course

The 67 students who dropped out of the course were specifically asked (Q4) their reasons for doing so, with 79% providing a response. Multiple reasons were given by a number of respondents.



The graph above indicates that the great majority did so for reasons outside their control, with 38% stating that unexpected commitments or health factors (23%) precluded attendance.

- *Unexpected visitor from overseas*
- *I had flu and was too sick to attend and was quite disappointed not seeing this course out to the end because it was very enjoyable.*
- *I just loved the sessions I attended and was bitterly disappointed when I had to miss the last two. My husband's health suddenly deteriorated just as we were moving house, so the burdens on me were almost overwhelming.*

A further group were generally too overcommitted to attend (7%) or no longer able to make the class time

- *I work part time and was asked to do some extra days which clashed with the course*
- *I did miss a few sessions due to house renovations before selling my house. Then missed the last two cos I got mixed up with the dates as there was a two week break.*
- *Class time changed and did not suit*

From the accompanying comments, it would seem that a number of students had prior holiday plans or other commitments they knew would entail missing some weeks of the overall course, accounting in part for the "other" selection.

- *Several overseas trips from March onwards*
- *I knew from beginning I could only do 2 weeks of the course.*

As such, only 13% students reported dropping out due to class suitability or dissatisfaction with the course.

- *I had anticipated that the level would be a more 'gentle' one, and for me this particular approach was not appropriate.*
- *Not as well presented with enthusiasm as I would have liked. Slides were not as clear and up to date as I had expected.*
- *The information was fascinating. There wasn't much interaction and that made it hard to motivate myself to get there.*

What students most liked about their course

Students were asked an open question about what they most liked about the course (Q6). Of the 407 commenting, a handful said "everything" or "nothing", while many nominated multiple aspects of the course, providing a range of factors (n=539) for grouping and analysis.

Clearly the most important factor in students' enjoyment of the course is the tutor, with 40% of comments relating to the tutor's approach, depth of knowledge, enthusiasm and commitment to the class.

- *Tutor was engaging, extremely skilled in her subject area, a great communicator and made the course extremely interesting. I cannot speak highly enough of her - she was excellent on every level. (Contemporary Art)*
- *Extraordinary knowledge of lead walker, entertaining and friendly manner in which conducted. Has furthered my thirst for history of Melbourne. (Architectural Heritage Walks)*
- *I liked the inclusion of all the students. I very much appreciated the tutors enthusiasm about the novel not to mention her full understanding of what is a difficult book. The classes were totally enlightening. (James Joyce Ulysses)*
- *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. (English Romantic Poetry)*

A quarter of comments related more specifically to the quality of presentation and delivery of the course. Students noted the appropriate pitch and clarity of information/explanations given by the tutor; the good organisation and sequencing of materials; and skilled management of the class.

- *Tutor was organised - well prepared sessions. Use of technology was so good. She was excellent at pulling the class back to focus on her presentation. So much information was imparted, particularly the case studies she presented. (Independent Traveller)*
- *The tutor was very confident and competent, and clearly experienced in delivering training in this field. The course covered a wide field, but was so organised that there was time to provide individual assistance and handle questions. The course had sound aims which were clear to the group, which was diverse in skills but universally satisfied as I could judge. (Using iPad/iPhone)*
- *I like the way the tutors explained the grammar really well. They went through step by step explained each new topic. (Spanish for Absolute Beginners)*
- *Tutor takes us slowly and breaks down the essentials with a step by step approach. She concentrates on the essentials without overloading us with fine detail. (Bridge for Beginners)*

Many students nominated the course content as central to their enjoyment, commenting on the quality, range and depth of information provided and knowledge they had gained.

- *The mix of science facts and their application to everyday life- especially music and medical diagnosis/treatments (Physics of Sound & Music)*
- *Tutor covered the central issues in the conflict, between the resident population of Aboriginals, and the newly arrived white people. Using well chosen illustrations and examples from historical records, we were at the end in no doubt about the general issues (Frontier Wars)*
- *The variety of the content in each session. It introduced me to works of literature I had not previously encountered. It was fascinating looking at the changes to spelling and words that has occurred over time and the roots from which the words developed. (Survey of Medieval French Literature)*
- *Symbolism in the depictions of Indian Deities, a continuum of religious festivals, the significance of customs and behaviours, smatterings of a new language, complexity of a strange and alien alphabet,*

entertaining anecdotes ... all leading to a new understanding and a better appreciation of the largest proportion of those not born in Australia in my community (Know Hindi)

Equally as many specified their appreciation of the resources provided by the tutor, either as used in class or as future reference. Students liked the quality and variety of texts and class activities; videos, slides, internet links, cartoons and music used in class; class notes and the websites or other references for individual follow-up.

- *The sessions flowed well. Use of pictures, maps, tables, cartoons, music etc gave us a very rich feel of what Europe and Russia were like at the time of the tzars. The recommended films and readings gave us the opportunity to delve deeper. (Russian Revolution)*
- *I loved the singing. I found the demonstration of French language sites on the internet really useful for home revision. Although the role plays were challenging, they were needed by me to get my confidence in speaking French to a better level. (French Conversation & Culture)*
- *The enthusiastic delivery of up to the minute Research findings, with clear description and explaining the diagrams on the screens. The presentation of the material in different formats: Lecture, Diagrams, Videos, Notes, Student interactive Learning. (Intro. to Genetics)*
- *The handouts were extensive and covered all topics and points Helen made which allowed us to listen and partake without having to take notes of pertinent facts. (Independent Traveller)*

A fifth area of importance was for many students the knowledge sharing and interaction among class members, encouraged and fostered by the tutor.

- *Enjoyed the interaction with the group. Hearing each others' stories and discussing our perceived strengths and weaknesses in our writing was very constructive. The tutor, a skilled professional, guided these discussions, with good humour, constructive criticism and warmth, allaying any inhibitions we may each have harboured. (Intro. to Memoir Writing)*
- *The extra learning and interaction that came from other students. The acknowledgement by the tutors that they had new things to learn from the students. (Digital Photography)*
- *We got to discuss some poems by well-regarded poets each week. Everyone had a chance to contribute in class. It was good to hear other views and insights could be gained from everyone. (Poetry across centuries)*

A further group of comments focused on the camaraderie and empathy developed among students, especially in courses where a skill was being learned such as languages or IT.

- *The comfortable convivial atmosphere, everyone got on well with each other, and Christine with her humour conducted the course very well. (Creative Writing Workshop)*
- *Contact with like people who were finding difficulties mastering the iT age. (Internet Introduction)*
- *The atmosphere was particularly genial and the tutor allowed us to divert to topics in which we were most interested. The interaction between the participants was highly conducive to learning and the development of a strong interest in the Spanish culture. (Intro. to Spanish)*

The remaining 5% of comments related to various factors ranging from the small class size, the venue, health benefits, challenge provided by the course or its fit with their own goals.

Quality of course delivery

Students were asked how well their course rated on key aspects of class delivery indicative of good educational practice for mature learners. (Q8 see Table below)

	Disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Not applicable	Total
Well-organised sessions.	0.5% 2	14.5% 60	83.6% 346	1.4% 6	414
Friendly, supportive atmosphere	1.2% 5	6.8% 28	91.1% 377	1.0% 4	414
Relevant content	1.0% 4	8.9% 37	88.4% 366	1.7% 7	414
Clear and interesting presentation	2.2% 9	10.1% 42	86.0% 356	1.7% 7	414
Student participation and interaction encouraged	1.9% 8	13.3% 55	81.4% 337	3.4% 14	414
Included useful learning activities and resources	1.4% 6	19.1% 79	72.0% 298	7.5% 31	414
Right length	10.9% 45	21.0% 87	64.0% 265	4.1% 17	414

Of the 414 students completing this question, 91% strongly agreed that their course had a *friendly, supportive atmosphere*, with *relevant content* (88%) and *clear and interesting presentation* (86%). The vast majority also strongly agreed that their course had *well organised sessions* (83%), *encouraged student participation and interaction* (81%), and *included useful learning activities and resources* (72%). As in prior years, the area of least satisfaction was the *course length* (64% strong agreement).

Just over half (52%) of these students chose to elaborate on their ratings, with many reiterating themes expressed in Q6 above- about their tutor's excellence and specific aspects of course delivery.

- *One doesn't need to elaborate on excellent and strongly agree! The tutor was all the above. (French through Song)*
- *The tutor was able to bring me into the world of Joyce which if I was left to do so myself, would never have managed to do so. (James Joyce Ulysses)*

Students commenting on the course's friendly atmosphere noted the tutor's important role in fostering that, and other class members trust and support.

- *The tutor is very supportive of all the different personalities in the course and why we are all there. She always asks us what we think about certain aspects she is teaching and how we may put this into our daily lives. (Meditation)*

- *I was very appreciative of being able to learn in a supportive easy going environment. It was great to have this opportunity.(Using iPad/iPhone)*
- *Well informed and convivial atmosphere prevailed thanks to the keen response of all concerned. (Frontier Wars)*
- *The atmosphere set by leaders supportive of "having a go", reflection and insights. As noted above, high level of trust and interaction established, with tutors participating in the group process too. (Creative Journaling)*
- *The teacher was kindly to all, addressing and attending to us each and all throughout the sessions. Our opinions and guesses were heard out and gently commented on (Survey Medieval French Literature)*

Tutors played a similarly vital role in encouraging and managing student participation, and fostering interaction both within and outside class. Students satisfaction with the level of participation appeared affected by the course structure (eg lecture presentations or few sessions with much information to cover) and the tutors capacity to manage talkative/dominant class members.

- *The tutor tried to get everyone involved and certainly encouraged student participation. Students are at a range of levels in terms of speaking Italian and he was very patient. (Italian Conversation Intermediate)*
- *Many of the class members were new, but all were welcomed and encouraged to participate. Members inform the class of relevant events etc around Melbourne and socialise after class. The class come from a wide range of back grounds, and whilst the ratio of women to men is about 4 to 1, the men make a great contribution. (Poetry across Centuries)*
- *The amount of material presented was a invaluable introduction however the tight session timeline meant there was not really much time for interactive participation. Although the lecturer was happy to answer questions they necessarily had to be short. (Cathedrals of Medieval France)*
- *An issue with greater encouragement of student participation is that I suspect we would have wandered off on a range of tangents. I believe David, without being rude, was able to politely "brush past" potential distractions. (Russian Revolution)*

Students appreciated the planning and organisation tutors put into delivering their course, to ensure it ran smoothly, covered the breadth of the topic area, and did so in a clear and engaging way.

- *Each session was very interesting, entertaining and well organised, starting and finishing close to stated times yet flexible. The length was fine, allowing students to maintain concentration and then to leave wanting more. The flow of the presentation was steady, usually ensuring completion of topics without last-minute rush. (French Revolution)*
- *The tutors were always organised and prepared for the lessons of the day. They had materials ready for the students and provided extra resources if needed. (Digital Photography)*
- *This course is truly enabling the would-be traveller, beginner or experienced, with necessary skills and up-to-date information that applies to all aspects of the use of internet for travel from security, transportation modes and search options, cultural aspects, transportation, to a variety of accommodation options! (Internet Aid to Travel)*
- *Tutor is an excellent presenter, with clear progression of ideas and frequent checking that students understood concepts introduced. Material had right balance between physics and biology concepts that underpinned sound and hearing, and their application to world around us- all very relevant. (Physics-sound & music)*

Many commented on the value added to the course by the diversity of activities or resources used in presenting the course, and the helpfulness of class notes or references for later revision and

follow-up. However where technology failed lost class time was a source of frustration and dissatisfaction for a number of students.

- *Handouts excellent and later email provision of PowerPoint slides for reference. Tutor very skilled at making a "hard" topic accessible and engaging by use of video, internet links and personal anecdotes. (Complementary Medicine)*
- *Lots of pictures to support her topics. The visual examples makes the discussion very clear. Her lecture demonstrated the depth of her knowledge on the subject. (Cathedrals of Medieval French)*
- *Tutors session notes excellent for digesting material at home, and providing links to related sites/references. As above, the use of on-line segments aided understanding greatly- ditto for brain model brought to class initially. (The Brain)*
- *Although tutor was clearly well prepared, sometimes the commencement was delayed approx. 20 minutes due to the difficulties with setting up the AV equipment. (Contemporary Art)*
- *It was a little frustrating not to be able to use wifi on our personal iPads (Thinking about iPad/iPhone)*

Of the almost two-thirds of students very satisfied with the course length, some acknowledged the tutor's time commitment, the introductory nature of the course, the excellent coverage of a specific topic, and their own unlimited thirst for "more".

- *As this course was only an introduction, I felt it met all of my expectations. It has given me the confidence to enrol in the subsequent Spanish Course. (Intro. to Spanish)*
- *The right length is difficult as I could easily have enjoyed a 2 hour session each week or more sessions , but, not due to any fault of the presenter. Each week was impeccably planned and executed. (Cathedrals Medieval France)*

Where students commented less positively on course length, many wanted greater in-depth study/discussion of topics covered or an extension to new related topics, through additional weeks or longer class sessions.

- *Would have been great if course was longer and provided a few supervised sessions. (Beginners Bridge)*
- *The combination of class room presentation and field trip was excellent, but would have liked the course to be longer. That would have enabled greater coverage of relevant art movements and more student discussion. (Contemporary Art)*
- *Sessions could have been longer as there was a lot of interaction & discussion at times (Finances in Retirement)*

Several students requested shorter classes, greater spacing of classes or follow-up review, especially where new skills were being acquired.

- *Possibly slightly longer , or more time between classes: ie fortnightly. (Using an iPad/iPhone)*
- *I felt the course was too intense. Would have preferred it to be spread out over a longer time. (Motivation to Refocus)*

Given this overall high rating of course delivery, were there any differences evident between students completing their course and those who dropped-out along the way?

While the numbers are relatively small (57 respondents), those who had not completed the course tended to rate their course less highly than those attending till the end, in all aspects apart from "course length". This was particularly evident in regards to *included useful learning activities and resources*, with 47% "Dropouts" compared to 17% "Completing" students providing a Disagree or Somewhat Agree rating. A similar disparity occurred in ratings of *well organised sessions* (32% : 12% respectively), and *clear/interesting presentation* (30% : 10%).

This suggestion of greater dissatisfaction with course delivery was not however reflected in elaborative comments made. Almost half of the "Dropout" respondents provided some comment on their ratings, but apart from several critical responses, the majority indicated enjoyment of the classes they attended or wish that the course was longer.

- *As you can see, the course was beyond my expectations. The background handouts were particularly thoughtful from the tutors (Neighbourhood Strolls)*
- *A very well prepared and organised course. (Physics- sound & music)*

Suggested changes to the content, delivery or organisation of the course

Students were asked (Q7) if they had any suggestions for changes in terms of content, delivery or organisation of the course they attended. A total of 72% of all respondents commented on this question. Almost 50% of these saw no reason make any changes to the course they had completed.

The largest number of students who provided suggestions thought that their course could have been longer or include follow-up review sessions.

- *"Would very much have appreciated its continuation, or more detail of the period we were examining so the course could have run for at least the year" (History of the French Revolution)*
- *"It was really good, if it were longer it would provide opportunities for more visits and 'hands on discussion' " (Contemporary Art)*
- *"Another session would have been good." (Internet as an aid to independent travel)*
- *"A follow up session some months after completion of the original short course would be beneficial to help bed down the learning and hear how other students have applied the course material." (Learning a foreign language)*

A small number of students commented on the course content which provides valuable feedback to the individual tutor considering repeating or extending their course.

- *"The relationship between war and civilization is a more fundamental question and better topic than the relationship between war and democracy. The latter more directly engages political partisanship with predictable outcomes given the USA demographic." (Democracy and War)*
- *"Perhaps focus on specific areas / regions, as some details which apply to certain regions do not necessarily apply to others. eg Travelling in Europe differs greatly from travelling in North America, which in turn differs greatly from Asia or South America, etc." (Independent Traveller)*
- *"Add several other localities like North Melbourne and Richmond." (Architectural Heritage Walks)*

There were some useful specific suggestions on classroom delivery for the tutor to consider.

- *"Make it more of a learning experience, by correcting our mistakes. We are all adults and can cope with our imperfections" (Italian conversation Intermediate)*
- *"It may be hard to achieve in a two hour session, however the opportunity for participants to deliver a short two minute presentation would enhance speaking and listening skills." (French Conversation and Culture)*
- *"A map showing where the churches and cathedrals mentioned in the course. Some handouts with information on the topics" (Cathedrals of Medieval France)*

Suggestions on organisation included comments on accommodation and equipment matters.

- *"No changes to content, or delivery, the only criticism I have was the location of our classroom, adjoining a lunchroom type kitchen, where there was constant chattering and loud laughter. It did distract us on many occasions we had to politely ask the persons in the kitchen to be quieter, so that we could hear to teacher" (Cathedrals of Medieval France)*
- *"Venue did not support Wi-Fi, thus some typical internet situations could not be replicated" (Independent Traveller)*

What students gained from attending their course

Answer Choices	Responses (N= 414)	
knowledge	91.1%	377
skills	37.9%	157
improved health/wellbeing	10.6%	44
motivation/inspiration	51.9%	215
companionship	30.2%	125
confidence	25.1%	104
other	3.9%	16

As in previous years a high number of students, 88% of the 470, responded to this question (Q9). The majority stating that knowledge, motivation, skills and companionship were the key outcomes for them.

Knowledge.

Knowledge has consistently been the main outcome nominated by students, with a higher rate this year (91%) compared to 80% in 2013. Many students elaborated on their choice of outcome.

- *"Knowledge of what to ask GP/pharmacist about drugs or other options for treatment/prevention (based on evidence); of how to read product labels and understand what they actually mean; where to go for reliable evidence about products and practices" (Complementary Medicine)*
- *"As a writer I need to understand and appreciate the various styles literature has to offer, this book is a classic that needs to be understood by every writer" (Ulysses for Devotees)*

- *"The course helped to build up my existing knowledge base re use of Internet for travel related research. I learned a number of additional techniques and discovered a couple of excellent websites that I had not been aware of previously". (Internet Aid to Independent travel)*

Skills

In addition, 39% of respondents considered that they had either learnt new skills or improved existing skills from attending their course. This was particularly the case for foreign language and technology courses.

- *"Great opportunity to learn independently with similar aged group. Promotes a feeling of mastery over technology instead of being out of one's depth." (Using an iPad/iPhone)*
- *"Feel able to continue to develop writing skills and drafting a manuscript." (Memoir Writing)*
- *"I am much better prepared for speaking French in France." (French for Travellers)*

Motivation/Inspiration

Over half (52%) said that they were either "motivated" or "inspired" by attending their courses.

- *"Motivated to explore. Confidence in getting around via public transport & taking up photography" (Architectural Heritage Walks)*
- *"Knowledge gained- a mind-set and openness to experiencing and questioning the art encountered. This will inspire me to revisit many of my books and opinions about artists/ works from before doing the course, and keep seeing new art". (Contemporary Art)*
- *"Motivated to continue to try and improve conversational skills which is the hardest part of learning a foreign language in my opinion." (Italian Conversation: Intermediate)*
- *"Motivation inspired me to read as much as I can on the subject" (Russian Revolution)*
- *Actually got me started on a painting I had been planning to start months before (Motivation to Refocus)*
- *As previously mentioned, feeling sufficiently supported and encouraged, with the additional aid of new knowledge, to keep learning and experimenting outside of the classes. (Digital Photography)*

Companionship

U3A members who attend classes often comment on the companionship they experience. It was a strong factor with 30% of students indicating this was an important outcome for them.

- *"I enjoyed meeting others who love poetry as it's a minority taste, perhaps. I plan to read further into some poets whose work we have only touched on" (Poetry across the centuries)*
- *"I ticked companionship because I know many of the people in the class because we have a common interest in medieval and renaissance art history." (Cathedrals of Medieval France)*

Confidence

Twenty-five percent of respondents considered they had gained confidence from attending their course.

- *"More confidence in trying eBay etc." (Internet Introduction)*

- *"I think that we came out of this training with enhanced confidence and hence less stress about this new technology. Confidence building was a strong message in the teaching."* (Using an iPad/iPhone)
- *The knowledge gained has given me confidence and an entrance level of understanding - enough to move forward in retirement planning. (Finances in Retirement)*
- *I am no longer feeling French is something I cannot do. (French for Travellers)*

Improved Health/Wellbeing

An improvement in health or wellbeing as a result of their course participation was noted by a smaller group of students (10%)

- *"Singing improves wellbeing. Singing popular French songs was fun and we learnt a little bit too"* (French through Song)
- *"Attending courses really improved my health and well-being as it gave me something to focus on in my life. The other people attending the course were very friendly and I enjoyed their company"* (Intro. to Genetics)
- *"An in-depth study of Romantic poetry. Improved my well-being by feeling happy with like-minded people in class."* (English Romantic Poetry)

Additional comments made about their course

This open question (Q10) sought further comment on the students' perception of their course, in addition to issues raised in earlier questions.

However of the 44% who responded, the majority did not have any new comments, rather reiterating earlier themes such as content, course length, accommodation or noted the value of the course topic to members.

- *"Think there is certainly a place for a course like this where a number of us are trying to fathom the ever and fast- changing world we live in."* (Internet Introduction)
- *"Its repetition would benefit many U3A members. The venue at National Seniors was pleasant except for the furniture arrangement enforced by the narrowness of the room."* (History of the French Revolution)

Several students made suggestions re scheduling and prior clarity of the course level or prerequisites.

- *"For a course such as this, perhaps the offering could suggest that applicants be at least be aware of the contents of a pocket 'French for Travellers'."* (French for Travellers)
- *"Like the idea of specific focus on one aspect of physics, as it allows exploration of various aspects involved at a basic level. Should course be called an 'introduction' ?"* (Physics of Sound & Music)
- *"Tutor was excellent. Suggest this short course could be promoted early in each academic year as a useful adjunct to formal language courses"* (Learning a Foreign Language)

Many students further emphasised their love of their course and appreciation of the tutors approach

- *"I enjoyed the relaxed manner in which our instructor conducted the course and also his approach to what it was that we wanted to get out of the course."* (Intro. to Spanish)
- *"I really enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere and the learning process."* (James Joyce's Ulysses)

Suggestions for New Courses

As a means of informing course planning, students were specifically asked if they had any suggestions for new courses (Q11). Sixty-seven percent either said "No" or skipped this question. Those responding often made multiple suggestions.

Of the suggestions made, over a third (38%) essentially sought an extension of the completed course, either in terms of new aspects for study, or a greater depth to topics already covered.

- *Perhaps more on Arthur and the various associated legends (Intro. to Medieval Romance)*
- *Creative writing should be an ongoing course, or perhaps a rotating program of short stories and novels, one each every 6 months. (Creative Writing Workshop)*
- *Similar course related to Physics of Every Day Things- similar length and presenter. There are all sorts of areas- strength of materials, kinetics, light are ones I can think of off-hand. (Physics- sound & music)*
- *On a similar topic - The rise and fall of Stalin and the USSR would be interesting (Russian Revolution)*

Grouping the other suggestions, several areas of common interest stand out.

There was strong interest in more Literature and Poetry courses, with some students nominating the genre or specific texts for study.

- *I wish there could be a play reading group to read together modern drama - not to study at home and then talk about in class! (Poetry of First World War)*
- *More poetry perhaps Australian early 20 century. Irish poets.(Intro. to Medieval Romance)*
- *Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat; Lord Alfred Tennyson's Ulysses; Homer's Iliad, Odyssey (Poetry of First World War)*

History was suggested by a number of students, especially American, English and Irish history which have not been taught in recent years.

- *Yes History. American. English from Roman times up until Elizabethan (Poetry of First World War)*
- *I'd be interested in Celtic prehistory and history/ literature of Ireland. Also Byzantine history and a course for beginners i-Phone. (French for Travellers)*

A group of students were interested in better managing their Photos, with a focus on technology and skills in uploading, organising, editing and printing their pictures in various formats.

- *I 'd like to learn how to organize photos on the internet. Also download and uploading photos. (Digital Photography)*
- *Editing digital photos with free software like Picasso....or what to do with the 3000 photos you bring home from a trip! (Digital Photography)*

Others suggested courses on Computers, internet and Smart technology (Apple & android) to up-skill in important new areas.

- *I would love to know how to use my smart phone more skilfully, and some internet skills such as sending documents, loading photos and posting images on Facebook. (Contemporary Art)*

- *I would appreciate a course on android phones and tablets. Apple seems very well catered for, but impossible to find courses on android. I think it's really important for seniors to catch up on new technology & not all have access to help from family- which is not always very successful anyway (Motivation to Refocus)*

The desire for more Art Appreciation courses, including Aboriginal art, was also clearly evident.

- *More short, sharp talks on Art appreciation (Contemporary Art))*
- *More art appreciation courses. Also painting, sculpture, dance, stretching. (Contemporary Art)*

A better focus on Health was also sought, through gentle exercise (Pilates, Thai Chi, Feldenkrais), more vigorous activities (dancing, aerobics, bike riding, walking, other sports) and nutrition information.

- *Ballroom/Tango Dancing, Stretching and gentle movement exercises like Feldenkrais. (Motivation to Refocus)*
- *More gentle exercise classes, eg walking group , yoga or Pilates (Yoga for Seniors)*
- *Sports, such as tennis, badminton, bowling. This would attract younger members (Cathedrals of Medieval France)*

Smaller clusters related to other areas, such as sciences and foreign languages. The full list of suggestions has been passed on to the Course Coordination team for reference.

Comments about our U3A Melbourne City course program overall (Q12)

The 50% of students who commented on this question mainly talked about the excellent and diverse courses that are offered by U3A Melbourne City, as well as the dedication of both Tutors and other volunteers involved.

- *"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." (Complementary Medicine)*
- *"Fantastic selection of courses with such a variety of very talented presenters. Congratulations to you all." (Using an iPad or iPhone)*
- *"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" (Cathedrals of Medieval France)*
- *"Superbly run by a great bunch of volunteers and tutors. We are so lucky!" (Neighbourhood Strolls)*

A number of students commented on their preference for short courses.

- *"Seems excellent to me. Tend to zero in on Short Courses as have plenty of things happening at this stage of my life." (Independent traveller)*
- *"Short courses are ideal for my lifestyle and wanting to try out lots of different things" (Biology & Psychology of the Brain)*

Students also expressed appreciation of the value for money they receive when enrolling at U3A Melbourne City

- "It is wonderful to have these courses available and accessible for such little cost. I feel very privileged to be able to access U3A" (Digital Photography)
- U3A runs good courses at very reasonable membership (cost)" (English Romantic Poetry)
- "It's terrific! Great courses and tutors for a rock bottom price." (Independent Traveller)

Some also made specific suggestions about courses they would like to see incorporated into the program. These essentially reinforced the comments made in Q11 regarding the need for more history, art appreciation, architecture, technology and health courses.

Discussion

With the participation of the largest number of short course students in the 5 years since the Student Feedback Policy was introduced, it is pleasing that yet again their feedback strongly endorses the value and excellence of the program.

Members enrol in chosen courses for a variety of reasons, but especially because of a general interest in the topic area or a desire to deepen their particular skills or knowledge. Some have specific goals for their participation, while others want to try something new. The importance of tutors eliciting student's enrolment reasons initially is evident given this diversity in motivation.

That tutors did cater for this range of student expectations is indicated in the high (86% students) reporting that the course exceeded or very well met their expectations. Knowledge gained from course attendance was the most important outcome for almost all students (91%), together with the inspiration provided by the tutor and fellow students (52%) to take their interest or skills further on completing the course. The additional benefits of companionship and confidence reported by a sizable group of students indicates that our educational program is meeting both the intellectual and social needs of members.

Clearly the key to this achievement is the individual tutors whose knowledge, professionalism, passion and inclusive approach is greatly valued by students. While a fifth indicated the tutor's reputation influenced their enrolment, almost half (40%) identified the tutors enthusiasm, approach and knowledge as what they *most liked* about the course. This was further reflected in open comments about the course and the desire expressed for extended or other courses by the same tutor.

The tutors skills in class delivery and creating an interactive friendly atmosphere for learning were evident, with many students' identifying these factors as what they *most liked* about the course, and further endorsed in their feedback on specific aspects of course delivery. Tutors were rated highly, with strong agreement regarding well organised sessions (83%), content relevant to the topic (86%), clear and interesting presentations (86%), creating a friendly and supportive atmosphere (91%), and encouraging student participation and interaction (81%) - all factors that facilitate mature age learning.

The slightly lower rating re inclusion of useful learning activities and resources (72%) is attributable in part to the number of students who saw that as *not relevant* to their particular course, and to technical problems encountered in some classes by tutors struggling with unfamiliar or limited equipment. As workshops encourage tutors to explore using different technologies and students

have more sophisticated expectations, the varying capacities of hired venues (especially regarding wifi) will be becoming more challenging. The value added to classes through presentations that include visual material, internet access, and emailed class notes (often containing website references and links) is evident in comments cited by students earlier in this report. The added value of "field" trip activities in several courses was also highlighted as an important factor in applying class room learning, and could potentially be further encouraged.

Extending or refocusing the course to deepen and widen study opportunities in a topic area is keenly sought by many students- reflected in their lower rating of the course length (64%), suggestions for change to the course and ideas for new courses. While undoubtedly influenced by the nature of courses surveyed, there is strong support for more courses covering literature and poetry, history, art appreciation and architecture, smart technologies, the management and editing of photos. While fewer in number, students attending more science based courses were eager to see more of this genre added to the program.

Comparing this 2014 feedback on course delivery with the prior year, the agreement rating is however somewhat lower on all aspects apart from class length. Endorsement of good class organisation, student participation and useful resources/activities in particular being between 10%-14% lower. Potentially the inclusion of students who did not complete the course might have affected the quality agreement response. Thus, comparing the ratings of completing students with the 2013 findings, the gap in all areas is reduced, although a difference between of 6%-9% remained in the areas noted above. This could perhaps be a factor of the larger numbers and new electronic survey approach- with forms not handed back to the tutor for collection and time for more considered rating at home, providing potentially a more valid response.

Having included "withdrawn" students through our new survey technology, what then did we learn about the drop-out phenomenon? Although there is some suggestion that students who withdrew before the end of the course may have been less specifically committed to the course (reasons for enrolment p5), and less satisfied overall (expectations p5) and with key aspects such as session organisation, presentation and resources/activities (p12), this is not reflected in the reasons and comments made about why they dropped out. The majority indicated they withdrew due to reasons unrelated to their satisfaction or engagement with the course. Health issues, unexpected and competing personal commitments to family, work and community accounted for 87 % of reasons given, confirming the analysis of information given to office volunteers by members withdrawing from yearlong and short courses.

As such, **we can conclude** that the short course program continues to deliver quality educational opportunities to our members, who appreciate its excellence and value the diversity, affordability and flexibility it provides. Individual reporting to tutors throughout the year has enabled tutors to see what students like about their course and to consider specific suggestions for change and extension to their course in the future. Overall themes reported here will serve to highlight areas for professional development with new and continuing tutors at future workshops.

Suggestions for new courses, plus comments on course length, technology and venues provide valuable information to coordinators in recruiting and organising our ongoing program. Students clearly recognise the generosity and commitment of tutors and all involved in organising the

program, to so well meet their needs. Their appreciation, assessment and comments are a rich source for promotion and funding purposes.

Given the consistency in student feedback about the short course program since 2010, it seems timely to extend the electronic survey to yearlong courses in 2015. With hundreds of new members in the 5 years since yearlong course feedback was previously sought, their views on this significant and stable component of our program is vitally important.

Recommendations

For stakeholders to benefit from this student feedback it is recommended that:

1. The Committee of Management make this report available to all Tutors and interested members via the website and the U3A Melbourne City office.
2. The Committee of Management and Promotions Committee use the report findings and student comments as appropriate in terms of grant applications and promotion to members and the wider community.
3. An Executive Summary of this report be distributed to tutors and published on the U3A Melbourne City website for all members information.
4. An article about the Student Feedback be written for the Newsletter to acknowledge and inform members and the general public about quality and outcomes of the 2014 short course program.
5. The report be used as appropriate at Tutors' Workshops/Meetings to reinforce positive tutoring approaches with mature age students.
6. The Course Coordination Team consider suggestions by members in respect of short course development and organisation of the U3A Melbourne City education program.
7. That electronic student feedback be continued in 2015 for new short courses and progressively introduced for yearlong courses, to better inform future improvement of the U3A Melbourne City education program.

Acknowledgements The Committee is greatly appreciative of the voluntary participation of students in this Feedback process, and the work of the Course Coordination Team volunteers who administered, analysed and reported on the Student Feedback.

Surveyed Courses

Architectural Heritage Walks (M. Nankervis)
August 1914 (G. Boag)
Biology & Psychology of the Brain (P. Salmon)
Bridge for Beginners (H. Kadera)
Churches & Cathedrals of Medieval France (L. Broughton) X 2 courses
Complementary Medicine (K. Harvey) x 2 courses
Contemporary Art: Appreciating the Art of our Era (A. McGravie-Wright) x 2 courses
Creative Journaling (A. Duyndan & J. Camilleri)
Creative Writing Workshop (C. Ferrari)
Democracy and War (J. Foks)
Digital Photography (M. Warlond & J. Thompson) x 2 courses
French conversation and culture (S. Holbertson)
French for Travellers (I. Jury)
French through song-Autumn (J. Melland)
French Through Song- Spring (J. Melland)
Frontier Wars (D. Williamson) x 2 courses
History of the French Revolution (J. Jeffries)
Independent Traveller (H. Mariampolski) x 2 courses
Internet as an aid to independent travel (H. Mariampolski) x 2 courses
Internet Introduction (P. Caldwell)
Intro. to Genetics & Genetic Ancestry (P. Salmon) x 2 courses
Intro. to Medieval Romance (B. di Napoli)
Intro. to Memoir Writing (G. Alexander)
Intro. to Spanish (R. Bieber)
Introduction to the Tristan legend (W. Devine)
Italian Conversation: Advanced (F. Forte)
Italian Conversation: Intermediate (F. Forte)
James Joyce's Ulysses (F. Devlin-Glass)
Know Hindi to Know Indian Culture (R. Dave)
Learning a foreign language (I. Pearson)
Managing your Finances in Retirement (R. Lees)
Meditation (K. Baxi)
Motivation to refocus your life (I. Marchment) x 2 courses
Neighbourhood Strolls (P. Newbury)
Physics of Sound & Music (B. Jeffries)
Poetry across the centuries (T. Page)
Poetry of the First World War: Bitter Fruit (B. di Napoli)
Russian Revolution: The Fall of Tsardom (D. Hone)
Spanish for absolute beginners (I. & I. Uberman)
Survey of medieval French literature (W. Devine) x 2 courses
Thinking about an iPad/iPhone (I. Mackay) x 3 courses
Thinking about music (C. Lowy)
Ulysses for Devotees (F. Devlin-Glass)
Using an iPad or iPhone (I. Mackay) x 2 courses
With us Yet-English Romantic Poetry (B. Di Napoli)
Yoga for seniors (M. Pillai)