

Evaluating the Student Experience: Reflecting on the value to the University

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Objectives

- To evaluate factors affecting student retention and attrition;
- To evaluate students' perception of the quality of their university experience ;
- To provide students with a constructive opportunity for reflection;
- To enable the university to plan how to better facilitate students' transition, development and performance.



Why evaluate the student experience

Costs

for the individual


for the institution

Benefits

for the individual

for the institution



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- Knowing that attrition is greatest in the first year does not, in itself, tell us what institutions can do during that year to enhance the likelihood of persistence and degree completion. For that we have to know about the different types of learning which arise in the university and the forces which shape those learnings (Tinto, 1995, p.2).

Method

- Anonymous postal questionnaire
- Return in reply-paid envelope, through the post or the university's internal mail system.
- Reminders were not a feasible option.
- A university pen was included with each questionnaire pack with the invitation to use it to fill out the survey form as an incentive
- The manual task of assembling the packs for each iteration (pens were only included in the 1st survey) was carried out by postgraduate students.

Sample

- All students enrolled for their first year of full time study
- 972 (54%) students responded to the first questionnaire administered in April 1996;
- 777 responded to the second questionnaire in September 1996;
- 726 (52%) completed survey forms were received in September 1997;
- 507 (48%) replied in the final round in September 1998.
- 130 students who had completed a questionnaire in 1996 and were not enrolled in June 1997 were followed up and 80 phone interviews were completed with these students.



Reflecting on the method

- Appropriate
- Effective
- Efficient



What did the students say

- Issues that could be dealt with by the university
- Issues that could not be dealt with by the university



Area of Difficulty	Expect April 1996	Actual Sept 1996	Actual Sept 1997	Actual Sept 1998
	%	%	%	%
Financial	46.8	46.2	56.2	57.4
Study skills	28.2	30.5	23.8	18.8
Knowledge of subject areas	28.0	22.5	18.7	13.5
Daily living (eg Transportation ...)	18.9	21.0	18.4	12.5
Social	11.0	19.3	15.3	11.5
Written/spoken communication skills	16.3	11.8	8.7	9.7

Paid Work

- *I feel worried that I am not able to study enough for my courses because I have to work. I find it difficult to find time to get involved in campus activities.*



Time Management Advice

- *‘Get organised so you know what you’re doing, don’t procrastinate, ask lots of questions ... be prepared to confront lecturers – after all that’s what you’re paying them for. Get your moneys worth.’*



Area of Difficulty	1996		1997		1998	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Time Management	199	27.8	120	18.5	95	21.3
Financial	99	13.8	107	16.5	100	22.4
Social	77	10.8	15	2.3	21	4.5
Study skills	73	10.2	88	13.5	71	15.9
Daily living	73	10.2	43	6.6	12	2.7
Balancing study/work/family	52	7.3	111	17.1	62	13.9
Health	41	5.7	54	8.3	61	13.6
Subject Knowledge	25	3.5	16	2.5	6	1.3
Communication skills	15	2.1	8	1.2	2	0.5
Motivation	50	7.0	51	7.8	48	10.7
Other	33	4.6	36	5.5	3	0.7

Motivation

- *‘The main difference at university compared to High School is that there is nobody running around after you. If you didn’t make the effort there will be no-one there to push you, but if you do make the effort, there are plenty of people available for advice’.*



Women	VUW %	Curtin %	Men	VUW %	Curtin %
The University environment did not suit me	33		Left the University for something more important to me	35	30
Discovered I did not like the course after I'd begun	28	18	The course does not suit my career choice	30	26
The course does not suit my career choice	26	26	Financial problems	26	30
Not committed enough towards study	26	9			

Of Value to Whom?

- Utilisation
- Politics
- Position
- Achievement





Tell us if you can William, how do you feel about first grade?

Punch 1978