

FIRST YEAR CORE COURSE LEADERS' COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE TOOLKIT

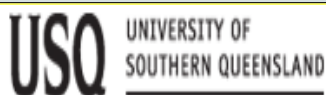
FIRST YEAR COURSE LEADERS TOOLKIT ITEM

*Criterion Referenced
Marking*

THE USQ CoPs PROJECT

Faculty of Arts CoP
and
Faculty of Business CoP

<http://www.usq.edu.au/cops>



Topic: Evaluating our teaching

Teaching and assessing to develop graduate skills and attributes

What is the intended outcome?

To design evaluation processes that provide rich, targeted data sources, which help us to make improvements to our teaching.

What is the established practice?

Currently, many teachers rely on standardised university evaluation processes, which target student experiences of our teaching and curriculum design. While student comments are available as potential qualitative data, the standard approach is broadly quantitative and cannot always offer the kind of detail, which allows us to make meaningful changes to our teaching practice.

What are the advantages for teachers and students in designing additional evaluation processes?

Our own evaluation processes can be designed to target particular aspects of our teaching or design. They also allow us to focus on student learning, rather than their experience of our teaching. Conducting evaluation processes at a time of our own choosing also allows us to solicit student feedback during semester, and make corresponding changes to improve our practice in the moment.

Background

Evaluation is a key approach used by reflective practitioners in higher education as a means of improving their teaching, whether in terms of delivery, content or design. While universities have formal evaluation processes for courses and teachers, these tend to be summative, largely quantitative, and focus on student experiences of our teaching, rather than student learning outcomes. Teachers wishing for timely, richer, qualitative sources of information, either in relation to their own teaching, or student learning outcomes will benefit from the use of other methods.

Challenge

The challenge for first year convenors of large classes is to devise methods of evaluation that provide them with a timely, rich source of data without overburdening either themselves or their students. Additional means of evaluation are particularly important in this context because first year courses, as a whole, tend to score lower in standard evaluation processes than courses from other years.

Approaches that provide the richest source of information

The standard quantitative evaluations do contain students' comments, which are available on request. Some community members use these comments as a source of qualitative data, usually writing up a [thematic analysis](#) which organises and analyses student responses under particular topic headings.

Others use [in-class evaluations](#) of *one minute questions*, which allow them to collect and respond to student feedback during the semester rather than waiting until the end. Not only does this allow for the immediate implementation of changes, it also potentially generates some ownership of the course among students. Other efficient means of evaluation in large classes include [focus groups](#), where a broadly representative group of students is interviewed to obtain qualitative data about designated areas of interest.

Another efficient means of evaluating our teaching in large first-year courses is to arrange a [peer review](#) of our teaching. An ideal peer reviewer is someone who has some reputation as a good teacher in a comparable disciplinary area, and who does not have a close relationship to the person requesting the review.

For members wishing to focus on student learning, incorporation of processes within course assessment is a preferred evaluation strategy. One example of such an approach includes a compulsory [reflection piece](#) to be submitted with the major assessment item. Another approach used by members is to design a piece of assessment with the sole aim of requiring students to reflect about their learning in the course: [learning journals](#) are an example of this approach. Student performance, as indicated by percentages of grades across the spectrum, is also a means of evaluating the effectiveness of our assessment and assessment-related teaching.

Key points for effective evaluation of teaching

- Find ways of using existing information, such as comments from standard university collection processes, unsolicited feedback, and student grades as evaluation data
- Use efficient means of evaluating students, such as in-class evaluations and focus groups, during semester as a means of using feedback to make on-the-spot improvements and engage students' sense of ownership
- Peer review of our teaching by an appropriate colleague is an authoritative source of feedback, particularly for those seeking promotion or awards
- For maximum efficiency, incorporate evaluation processes into assessment tasks. This also have the added benefit of developing students' understanding and judgement about the way they learn.

Final word

Those community members who currently use additional means of evaluating their teaching and course design gain richer, better focused sources of feedback to help them improve their teaching. More importantly, they have also taken control of the process, rather than simply submitting to generic university evaluation methods that tend to focus broadly on the student experience.