

WHAT STUDENTS WANT

This information flyer is based on evidence provided in the report: Geoff Scott (2005) *Accessing the Student Voice*, from the Department of Education, Science and Training.

The report provides an analysis of students' qualitative responses to the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ), which is administered to graduates of Australian universities in the months following graduation.

CEQuery software was used to identify what improves student retention rates and what encourages learning in Australian higher education. It is the first analysis of qualitative student comments included in CEQ responses:

It is estimated that at least 300,000 students have written over half a million 'best aspects' and 'needs improvement' comments on the CEQ since it was first distributed in the early 1990s, yet no systematic analysis of what graduates have said has been undertaken. This study used a database of the 168,376 comments made by 94,835 graduates from a representative sample of 14 Australian universities between 2001–2004 to address this research gap. (Scott 2005)

The purpose of the project was to:

- identify what engages students in productive learning; and
- provide an evidence-base to improve, 'the quality of learning design, course delivery, student support and assessment in university learning programs along with their associated support services, administrative systems and infrastructure' (See below for full report).

Key findings

The total experience counts

it is the combination of consistently capable staff, with appropriate learning designs and a support system that enables them to deliver what is intended that is critical. (Scott 2005).

Course design counts

What students want is:

a sound, responsive, flexible, relevant, clear and mutually reinforcing course design – a design that uses an appropriate variety of interactive, practice-oriented and problem-based learning methods. (Scott 2005)

Staff count

What students want is:

capable, committed, accessible and responsive staff being in place to deliver and improve the design during implementation. (Scott 2005)

In the CEQ positive comments about staff predict high ratings for the majority of the CEQ scales and negative comments predict low ratings. Staff actions strongly influence students' perceptions.

Learning methods count

What students like is:

1. traditional university *face-to-face* methods, with a preference for interactive learning strategies (e.g. buzz groups, debates, lectures, mentoring, peer-support, seminars, small group/team work);
2. *independent study* and negotiated learning (e.g., self-teaching packages and distance education materials, portfolios and theses);
3. *practice-oriented and problem-based learning* (e.g. artistic productions, camps, case studies, practica, site visits, service learning; overseas study exchanges);
4. *simulated environments and laboratory* methods (e.g. experiments, hypotheticals, mock trials); and
5. *technology enabled learning* (e.g. CDs, email, phone contact, teleconferences, online, and web-based learning).

Students generally see CIT as being just one component of what supports effective learning, and that it is no substitute for interactive, face-to-face methods of the types identified above. For this group of 95,000 students, learning remains a profoundly social experience.

Student support counts

What students want is:

efficient and responsive administrative, IT, library and student support systems actively working together to support its operation. (Scott 2005)

Assessment counts

What students want is:

relevant, consistent and integrated assessment of a university standard that the course's design, learning methods and resources specifically enable students to complete. (Scott 2005)

Students' motivation count

What motivates students in terms of their university experiences is:

- relevance to their career, further study plans, general interests and social and intellectual needs;
- consistency with their general values;
- distinctiveness i.e. a program that has potential to give them 'the edge' in a competitive market;
- achievable (that is, they can manage what is being asked of them, given other life demands and their particular background, abilities and experience).

Resources

Scott, G. 2005, *Accessing the Student Voice: Using CEQuery to identify what retains students, and promotes engagement in productive learning in Australian higher education*, Accessed 13 July 2009 : http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/profiles/access_student_voice.htm

Learning & Teaching Support
T: +61 7 4631 1685
E: academicdev@usq.edu.au
W: www.usq.edu.au/ltsu/develop/

USQ UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND
fulfilling lives