

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT
STUDENT COURSE EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE (SCEQ)
POSTGRADUATE COURSEWORK STUDENTS
ANALYSIS OF OPEN RESPONSE COMMENTS: 2005

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
1 INTRODUCTION	5
2 ARRANGEMENT.....	5
3 ANALYSIS OF THE COMMENTS: TAXONOMY AND PROCESS	7
4 DEGREE EXPERIENCE	9
4.1 ANALYSIS OF COMMENTS REFERRING TO THE BEST ASPECTS.....	9
4.2 ANALYSIS OF COMMENTS SUGGESTING IMPROVEMENTS	12
5 EXPERIENCE OF STUDENT ADMINISTRATION AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES	16
5.1 ANALYSIS OF COMMENTS REFERRING TO BEST ASPECTS	16
5.2 ANALYSIS OF COMMENTS SUGGESTING IMPROVEMENTS	18

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Student Course Experience Questionnaire (SCEQ), is designed to collect quantitative and qualitative data about postgraduate coursework students' perceptions of the quality of teaching and learning in their degree courses, as well as their perceptions of student administration and support services. As part of the questionnaire students are asked to provide comments on the best aspects of their university experience (degree and administration) and those that could be improved. Based on the responses to these questions, this document seeks to provide an analysis of the areas of best practice, and opportunities for improvement, in the experiences of postgraduate coursework students in the Graduate School of Government in 2005.

Degree experience: areas of best practice

The aspects of degree experience which attracted most positive comments from postgraduate coursework students were:

	<i>2005</i>
Learning community: learning environment	33%
Industry and professions: visiting staff/ lecturers	32%
Curriculum: content and structure	31%
Good teaching: standard of teaching received	24%
Overall satisfaction: quality of academic staff	15%
Curriculum: relevance to work/ career	15%

Degree experience: opportunities for improvement

The areas of degree experience which postgraduate coursework students considered most in need of improvement were:

	<i>2005</i>
Curriculum: content and structure	32%
Appropriate workload	25%
Appropriate assessment	12%
Learning resources: physical facilities	11%
eLearning: uptake by students/ staff	11%
Good teaching: standard of teaching received	11%

Student administration and student support services: areas of best practice

The aspects of student administration and student support services which attracted most positive comments from postgraduate coursework students in 2005 were:

	<i>2005</i>
Administration and organisation: general comments	41%
Customer service: quality	35%
Library services	9%
Administration and organisation: enrolment	6%
Services provided: availability and existence of services	6%
<i>No other aspects were mentioned in more than 5% of comments received</i>	

Student administration and student support services: opportunities for improvement

The aspects of student administration and student support services which postgraduate coursework students considered most in need of improvement in 2005 were:

	<i>2005</i>
Web communication: intranet/ internet	24%
Student union: VSU	20%
Library services	12%
Administration and organisation: general	8%
Services provided: advertisement of services	8%
Web communications: online access to services	8%

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1 Introduction

The Student Course Experience Questionnaire (SCEQ), is designed to collect quantitative and qualitative data about students' perceptions of the quality of teaching and learning in their degree courses, as well as their perceptions of student administration and support services. As part of the questionnaire students are asked to provide comments on the best aspects of their university experience (degree and administration) and those that could be improved. Based on the responses to these questions, this document seeks to provide an analysis of the areas of best practice, and opportunities for improvement, in the experiences of postgraduate coursework students in the Graduate School of Government in 2005.

Since there was no SCEQ in 2004, this is the first report on the qualitative results for the Graduate School of Government, which was established in June 2003. All enrolled students (168) from the School were surveyed in late 2005 – 123 responded.

In 2005 76% of students who responded to the SCEQ provided comments on the best aspects of their degree experience, whilst 52% provided comments relating to areas in need of improvement. 44% of respondents provided comments on the best aspects of their experiences of student administration and student support services, whilst 20% provided comments relating to areas in need of improvement. The substantial difference in the number of positive comments received compared to those expressing the opposite opinion, possibly indicates an overall satisfaction with the degree and administration/ support experiences of postgraduate coursework students in the Graduate School of Government.

Approximately 20% of respondents to the questions relating to suggested improvements (administration and degree), expressed satisfaction with their experiences within the faculty and the university and could not identify any areas in need of improvement. e.g. "To date I have found nothing I would not describe to be a quality product". *NB: these comments are omitted from the overall total of comments received for each question*

2 Arrangement

1. Degree experience
 - o Analysis of comments referring to best aspects
 - o Analysis of comments suggesting improvements

2. Experience of student administration and student support services
 - o Analysis of comments referring to best aspects
 - o Analysis of comments suggesting improvements

Within each section, responses are ranked according to the percentage of comments received for each aspect. Sample comments are provided for the six aspects that received the highest percentage of comments.

Only aspects that received more than 5% of comments in 2005 are included in this report. To preserve student confidentiality, sample comments are only provided if there are six or more comments relating to that aspect in the responses. Comments that may possibly identify the student are not been included in the sample comments. Comments are transcribed exactly as they appear in the original documents.

3 Analysis of the comments: taxonomy and process

The manual analysis and evaluation method used by the University is based on an in-house taxonomy which allows for standardisation of reporting across the university and ease of comparison with the SCEQ quantitative analysis reports. Within the taxonomy, the main categories are based on the SCEQ items, and sub-categories based on their characteristics. Additional categories, based on the frequency of occurrence in students' comments over the past four years, are also included. Categories for the analysis of comments relating to administration and support services are defined using the most commonly mentioned aspects e.g. quality of customer service, opening hours, staffing levels, online access to services; and names of individual services e.g. Counselling, Library, Student Centre.¹

This taxonomy is under constant revision as the need to sub-divide categories becomes apparent. For example, until 2005 the category *Online learning and resources* was used to record all comments mentioning students' experiences of elearning. In 2005, the increase of elearning across the university, and the review of its use, has necessitated the sub-division of this category into the following elements: *Online resources*; *Elearning: uptake by students/ staff*; *Learning management systems*; *Support provided*; and *Face to face vs. online learning*. NB: The SCEQ included specific questions on elearning for the first time in the 2005 survey. These additional qualitative analysis topics reflect these changes.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluation and feedback• Academic Board policies• Curriculum• Skills development• Learning community• Learning resources• Overall satisfaction• Good teaching | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clear goals and standards• Appropriate assessment• Appropriate workload• Elearning• Research-led teaching• Student progression and retention• Cultural diversity• Equity |
|--|---|

Categories used in the analysis of SCEQ Open Response comments

Each comment received is analysed according to the SCEQ Taxonomy, with those including more than one aspect being counted in each aspect mentioned.

Students undertaking double degrees were asked to identify which degree/s they were commenting on in their answer. Where this has occurred the comment is counted in the results for the applicable faculty; where this has not occurred, the comment is counted in the results for both faculties.

It should be noted, however, that the absence of favourable comments on a particular aspect of learning and teaching does not reflect that this is not an area of best practice. Rather that the students are happy with their experiences, and prefer to focus on commenting on areas in need of improvement. Since 2000, more comments have been received from postgraduate coursework students in reply to questions asking students to list areas in need of improvement than those asking for areas of best practice.

¹ A copy of the SCEQ Taxonomy is provided as a separate attachment.

4 Degree experience

4.1 Analysis of comments referring to the best aspects²

Learning community: learning environment (2005: 33%)

- The experiences and knowledge my fellow students brought and shared. They provided real life examples and practical solutions and encouraged debate/discussion
- Exposure to like-minded students and staff. All participants have similar interests i.e. Public sector, and this adds to a complete learning experience.
- The Australian and New Zealand School of Government is a great school fostering strong interrelationships amongst cohorts with residential schools and group work..
- The quality of fellow students - networking from a career perspective has been a significant gain.

Industry and professions: visiting staff/ lecturers etc (2005: 32%)

- Visiting Lecturers were experts in their field and the most relevant person for our group (all senior public servants) To discuss politics, XX XX; to discuss Policy XX XX
- High profile guests share their practical experiences.
- Bringing in external speakers, professionals in field (media).
- Exposure to senior, experienced public sector staff and (current and former) ministers has been invaluable, and the key to the success of this course. These presentations provide a direct link between academic studies and public sector operation. Such presentations have been extremely useful and the engagement of presenters with students has provided an unparalleled opportunity to test academic concepts and gain a broader understanding of public sector operation.

Curriculum: content and structure (2005: 31%)

- Meets my current learning needs i.e., how to be a better manager in the Public Sector. The range of subjects and interactions with other students in the course are highlights.
- The course provided the theory and current state of research relating to my occupation. This helped me appreciate why I was doing what I was doing.
- The opportunity to tie learning back to the workplace. The 'view from the top' - learning about public administration trends, issues and challenges at the macro level.
- The compressed timeline which meant the duration of work/study balancing was not too long. The targeted and tailored program which was specifically relevant to the public sector.

Good teaching: standard of teaching received (2005: 24%)

- The teaching staff knew their subjects well and were enthusiastic about teaching
- the teaching staff made their subjects highly interactive and actively added to our learning. They also used technology extensively.
- The calibre of the teaching staff and their commitment to their subjects
- The teaching was very good, with many interesting guest speakers brought in for specific units

² Number of comment received: 2005: 93

Overall satisfaction: quality of academic staff³

(2005: 15%)

- Lecturers are extremely knowledgeable in the subject matter and linked it to the workplace in an effective manner.
- The wide variety of researchers and practitioners that share their experiences and knowledge with us. Also, the chance to interact with other students.
- Lecturers have been terrific -knowledgeable and supportive and the 'visitors' provide additional insight that is invaluable.
- Access to some interesting practitioners is valuable. The calibre and experience of fellow students is also very stimulating and useful.

Curriculum: relevance to work/ career

(2005: 15%)

- The contacts made within the sector from this course was just as valuable and the chance to further research and explore issues of relevance to my employment and the public sector as a whole.
- The learning and gathering of information and knowledge that can be used for my profession and other aspects of my life.
- I have really enjoyed the integration of the academic and the practical aspects of the topics covered in the course. We have had lots of very interesting speakers. The issues we have been discussing are very relevant to my work.
- Exposure to a wide range of subject experts from outside the academic staff. This generates information and thought which is up to date, relevant and stimulating.

Other aspects mentioned included:

Good teaching: group work	<i>2005</i> 9%
Research led teaching	6%
Student progression and retention: quality of student intake	6%

³ Includes: Qualifications (as tertiary teacher); experience (in subject area); English language proficiency

4.2 Analysis of comments suggesting improvements⁴

Curriculum: content and structure

(2005: 32%)

- The demands of this course align more closely with a Masters qualification, or at least a degree, yet the award is presently a Graduate Diploma. The award does not reflect the rigour of this course or the demonstrated capacity students will have following completion. Consideration should be given to upgrading the award following this course to reflect the above.
- The contracted nature of the course (7 weeks of face to face over a 10 week semester) combined with full time employment and the assignment load was extremely challenging - particularly with the shrinking resources in the public sector and the increased expectation at the workplace. Whilst the 7 weeks at 2 days face to face should not be changed the semester should be expanded for the submission of assignments.
- Strategic Administration unit. Too many case studies, not enough detailed theoretical frameworks and concepts to apply to current situations. Too much focus on Sydney 2000 as only applicable example of public sector strategic administration.
- overly theoretical in some parts. The sheer volume of pre-reading

Appropriate workload

(2005: 25%)

- Workload management. This course is extremely demanding and all students work full time within the public sector. Many have experienced difficulties managing assessment demands and weekly reading requirements. Perhaps weekly readings could be shared among a group of students & key learnings could be shared, thereby reducing the burden for all students reviewing all articles? This model has worked well within the 'Managing Public Expenditure' course.
- Work load in Semester 2 was pretty heavy - maybe co-ordinate better between subjects to streamline the workload
- Workload was high and did not allow much time for personal reflection of issues etc
- The workload was extremely high at some points - [particularly for people holding down full time senior positions - the workload could be more balanced.

Appropriate assessment

(2005: 12%)

- Instructions on certain assessment items could have been clearer (this would likely avoid a mass of questions to the lecturers).
- Better focussed assessment in some subjects - the way assignments are framed is ambiguous.
- Discrepancies with the grading of assessment items and tolerances associated with word limits must be more consistently enforced in order not to disadvantage students who comply with requirements.
- Asking us to choose the weighing of assignment work which resulted in me receiving a lesser mark. The emphasis on marking class participation.

⁴ Number of comment received: 2005: 65

Learning resources: physical facilities

(2005: 11%)

- Can I say that the state of the facilities in the Merewether Building are disgusting. I did two subjects there on weekends and it was filthy. It's not only the learning environment that is created by the lecturers but also the physical environment to support it that is important. Bricks and mortar are part of the experience.
- Ensuring facilities were kept open until classes are closed for the evening
- There were times when the physical location of classes were not ideal, i.e. the Darlington centre room was not an ideal teaching room in being flat (meaning vision was sometimes obscured) and having poor air conditioning and seating.
- The actual lecture room is too small for the amount of students

eLearning: uptake by students/ staff

(2005: 11%)

- Online and other learning assistive technologies could be even more widely and effectively employed. The understanding of the potential functions and uses of Blackboard across courses and schools seems inconsistent and sometimes inadequate.
- Online resources, e.g., Blackboard, should be utilised more. This requires more commitment from staff rather than students.
- The third course I attended at Sydney Uni, was well below standards (in my opinion for a Masters level). The subject leader did not use technology merely using overheads with students madly copying down the notes (seems a bit archaic in today's times). When asked could the notes be put on a 'blackboard' or powerpoint copies sent to us, we were informed that this was not possible. I would think that all faculties at Syd Uni would be quite professional in their use of technologies and have access to same. Perhaps some of the lecturers skills need updating?
- Use of Blackboard as an on-line tool was invaluable, where it was available. All lecturers should be encourage to utilise this.

Good teaching: standard of teaching received

(2005: 11%)

- Teaching quality was generally poor. I was simultaneously undertaking a course at xxx and this course was not as well run or conceived. Frequently the rationale for course activity was not clear.
- Some of the lecturers are very unstructured. The readings bear no resemblance to the discussion of the day and the essay questions/requirements are extraordinarily unclear!
- some presenters were torturous to listen to; too much readings
- One subject I did - Communication in Professional Contexts was appallingly taught and organised

Other aspects mentioned included:

	<i>2005</i>
Good teaching: useful and timely feedback	9%
Clear goals and standards	8%
Overall satisfaction: quality of degree	6%
Learning resources: general	6%

5 Experience of student administration and student support services

5.1 Analysis of comments referring to best aspects⁵

Administration and organisation: general⁶ (2005: 21%)

- The staff in the Graduate School of Government are extremely helpful. I hadn't realised the extent of their support until I undertook an elective and had to deal with another school, where the interest/assistance was minimal to the point of not knowing where lecturers/lectures were and not offering to assist.
- The staff at the Graduate School of Government Office are a refreshing change after my previous experience with Faculty of Arts staff. They actually try to make things easier for students and assist with problems
- I have found the student support in the faculty to be excellent - the staff are interested in my problems and resolve issues promptly.
- The support provided by XX and YY in the School of Government was excellent. They were always on hand to assist with my inquiries.

Customer service: quality (2005: 35%)

- When you wanted to find something, there were always people willing to assist sometimes late in the evening.
- Very approachable and cooperative staff
- They are responsive to my requests, eg emails are answered promptly
- Willingness to assist students and to support post-graduate and part-time students. Information provided to students was of excellent quality

Other aspects and services mentioned included:

NB: all of the following aspects were mentioned in less than 6 comments. Therefore to preserve student confidentiality no sample comments are provided

Library services	2005 9%
Administration and organisation: enrolment	6%
Services provided: availability and existence of services	6%

⁵ Number of comment received: 2005: 44

⁶ This includes administration of the GSOG (where specifically mentioned in the comment).

5.2 Analysis of comments suggesting improvements⁷

Web communications: intranet/ internet

(205: 24%)

- Avoid issuing spam type of emails that are not worded succinctly and are consequently easily ignored. Everyone is busy and we often only glance at the first few lines - therefore the actions need to be in the first few lines.
- intranet site is not intuitive
- The English department could get a decent website.
- I would like to see better use a development of internet integration for using these services.

Other aspects mentioned included:

NB: all of the following aspects were mentioned in less than 6 comments. Therefore to preserve student confidentiality no sample comments are provided

Student union: VSU	2005 20%
Library services	12%
Administration and organisation: general	8%
Services provided: advertisement of services	8%
Web communications: online access to services	8%

⁷ Number of comment received: 2005: 25