



"U3A is a wonderful opportunity for all us seniors...."

Student Feedback on the 2010 Yearlong Course Program

Report December 2010

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Executive Summary

A Student Feedback Policy was introduced by U3A Melbourne City in 2010 as a means of providing students a formal voice in the ongoing development of our education program. Their feedback was envisaged as providing valuable information for tutors, course coordination and administration teams in reviewing, planning and delivering a high quality program to members in the future.

The Policy was embraced on a voluntary basis by tutors of 35 yearlong courses (spanning language, Humanities/Social Sciences, creative and brain-game courses), and 347 students attending classes early in August 2010 (84% attendees). Students provided written feedback to a series of questions eliciting comments about their experience of that particular course and the course program overall.

We found that members are attracted to courses for a variety of reasons, but predominantly because of a longstanding interest in a particular area, and the desire to learn or improve their knowledge and skills in a subject. The opportunity to learn with 'like minded' people and the positive reputation of the tutor or course were also reported as common motivating factors.

Members' expectations were not disappointed, with 95% reporting a good match between the advertised course description and the course as delivered, and a remarkable 98% rating highly their overall enjoyment of the course.

In examining the main reasons for students' enjoyment of their course, there is considerable consistency across the different types of courses and an emphasis on the class atmosphere and way classes are run. While students report enjoying their mastery and engagement with a specific language, game, creative activity or subject, the context for learning and practice appeared to contribute most to their enjoyment.

Language students, for example, enjoyed most the camaraderie, interaction and group discussion between members, as well as the variety of class activities. Some nominated the tutors native origins and teaching approach as significant to their enjoyment. Students in Humanities/Social Science subjects identified the core presentation and subsequent discussion as most enjoyable aspect of the course, along with the diversity of resources chosen by their tutor. The empathy and commonality between class members was most important for students in the Creative courses, a number of which are self-lead, followed by their enjoyment of the creative activity itself. Engagement with the complexities and challenges of their chosen game provided the greatest source of enjoyment for Brain-game students, along with the helpful and friendly atmosphere of the class across differing skill level.

The significance of the way classes are run to members' enjoyment and learning was reinforced by students' feedback about course delivery. In reporting on what they most liked about how the course was organised and run, students highlighted the informality and friendliness of the class (31%); the organisation and activity mix of classes (23%); the tutor's professionalism, enthusiasm, knowledge (15%) and patient support (7%). The egalitarian nature of the class and sharing of responsibility in leadership or skill

development was more specifically nominated by others. Unsurprisingly then, 97% students stated that they were able to participate in the class as much as they would have liked.

Students' satisfaction with their course was further evident when asked to comment on changes to course content or delivery, and the course generally. Only a minority of students suggested any changes, the majority commending the thoroughness of the existing curriculum, the tutor's expertise in selecting content, and in running the class in such a way as to accommodate students with differing skill, knowledge and confidence levels.

The nature of this consistent positive feedback about course delivery indicates that tutors are tailoring their approach to the learning needs of members and essentially teaching in line with best practice principles of adult education. Comments suggest tutors do respect and engage with students as equals, facilitating self-directed learning within a non-threatening open atmosphere. Additionally the use of diverse resources and activities within the course stimulates and sustains student interest on the one hand, and also promotes learning by practical application of new skills and knowledge.

Where students did suggest course changes, these pointed to areas where good practice could be further enhanced. In respect to course delivery, suggestions primarily related to factors that would stimulate and reinforce learning. In particular a greater use of audio-visual resources by the tutor, more class notes and advance reference reading, more or less homework, a greater emphasis on basics and revision, and in the case of language students more emphasis on oral exercises. Some students requested more frequent classes (especially where run fortnightly) or longer classes to consolidate learning, while other wanted 'time-out' breaks in the yearlong program.

Students were also highly enthusiastic about the quality and benefits of the course program overall, and U3A Melbourne City as an organisation. Many commented on the excellence and diversity of courses on offer, the accessibility of the program and its contribution to seniors' wellbeing through friendships and stimulation. The dedication and generosity of volunteers, both tutors and 'behind-the-scenes' people, was strongly acknowledged.

Nevertheless at an organisation level, students also suggested changes to future course planning and administration. Programming suggestions included new topics for future courses; the provision of language courses at progressive levels from introductory to advanced; the value of native speaking tutors; and engagement of tutors (rather than self-lead groups) where skill and technique development is important. More short courses were requested, and greater provision for members with special needs.

Student management feedback centred on the need for fairness to other members, be it in freeing up class places by irregular attendees and 'drop-outs'; respect for others in waiting outside or exiting classrooms; and less dominance of a class by individuals. Accommodation problems noted included Ross House classroom size, proximity and noise; the lack of room consistency across the year; and access to equipment at the Multicultural Hub.

In conclusion, student feedback would indicate that a diverse quality program is being offered by our volunteer tutors that goes a long way towards meeting students' needs. Moreover, from the high level of participation in the feedback process and the wealth of student comment, we can conclude that the policy objective of giving students a formal voice has been well met for those attending during the survey period.

Their feedback identifies the course aspects and teaching approaches that most contribute to their learning and enjoyment, affirming good practice and providing tutors with information to review and plan future courses, thereby meeting the second policy objective.

The student comments also provide valuable information for recruitment and diversifying our course program; developing Tutor Workshops and other resources; and improving course administration practices- all aspects of the third objective. Additionally, the survey findings and richness of student comments give the organisation a unique resource for future promotion and garnering support within the wider community.

Finally, the report makes recommendations regarding the distribution and use of the survey findings within the organisation so as to further the achievement of the policy objectives. In acknowledging the limitations placed on the reported findings by the lack of feedback from students who had previously withdrawn from the course, or were absent during the survey period, the report also recommends that the Committee of Management give priority to capturing the views of such students in 2011 over a repetition of this snapshot view of yearlong courses.

Introduction

As part of the ongoing efforts to develop and improve our educational program, in May 2010 the Committee of Management approved a Policy on formal written student feedback. This Policy covers both yearlong and short courses, and has the following specific objectives:

- To enable students to express their views about their learning experience and to contribute to course development
- To provide tutors with constructive feedback about the content and delivery of their course, along with suggestions for change
- To enhance the ongoing course planning, development and administration processes within U3A Melbourne City
- To better promote courses offered by U3A Melbourne City through use of comments and data summarised from student feedback.

In consultation with tutors, a short Feedback Form was developed to collect student views that was trailed and revised before implementation. A Tip Sheet for tutors was also developed to assist introduction of the new system (see Appendix).

It was acknowledged that this formal process would complement existing informal feedback processes that some tutors already had in place in their course.

Implementation

The Feedback process was introduced to yearlong classes in August 2010 so as to support forthcoming course planning for 2011. Multiple copies of the Form were placed in each Tutor's box, along with copies of the Tip Sheet to assist with distribution and engagement of students in this new procedure. Participation by both tutors and students was on a voluntary basis, with students having the option of completing the Form anonymously.

Tutors of the 45 yearlong/extended courses offered in August were given around 780 Forms for distribution and collection at their first class in the month. All but 10 tutors chose to participate in this initial Feedback survey, these being largely tutors whose courses were held outside Ross House.

As attendance is variable during winter months, not all enrolled students attended on the day. Thus some tutors chose to hand out the Form in the subsequent class to students absent on the first distribution day. In all some 412 students attended during the survey period, returning 347 Forms (84% overall return rate). The range of returns from attendees varied between individual courses from 45% – 100%. Two thirds of students (68%) provided their name on the Feedback Form.

Tutors had a week to look over their students' comments prior to handing the Forms in to the office for collation. Student responses were tallied and open questions analysed for emerging themes by the Course Coordinator and Coordination Assistant. Courses were grouped into 4 broad categories to enable analysis of any differences according to the nature of the course offered. These 4 groups were

- Languages (Japanese, German, Spanish, Italian, French, English)
- Humanities/Social Sciences (Philosophy, History, Economics, Shakespeare, Current Issues, Book and Movie discussions)

- Brain Games (Chess, Mah-jong, Cryptic Crosswords)
- Creative Activities (Crafts, Choir, Painting, Botanical Art, Writing, Floristry, Yoga).

In reporting on the findings, anonymous student quotes have been used extensively to illustrate the emerging themes and give voice to the diversity of student responses.

Major Findings

Overall enjoyment of the course.

Overall 90% students stated that they enjoyed their course very much, giving it a 5/5 rating. A further 8% were very positive, rating their enjoyment as 4/5. There was little difference between the types of courses in students overall enjoyment - 88% Language, 89% Humanities/Social Sciences, 92% Mind games and 95% Creative students giving their course the highest rating.

Initial attraction to the course.

To provide a context of students' motivation and expectations regarding their course, students were asked why they were initially attracted to the course. This open question elicited a variety of responses, with some students giving multiple reasons for enrolling (N= 361). The two main reasons given were a love or longstanding interest in the topic area (31%) and the desire to learn or improve their knowledge or skill in a particular area (33%).

- *"I love learning foreign languages" (German Language & Culture)*
- *"I love good movies and this was the chance to experience some of the best" (Movies of Merit)*
- *"I wanted to understand economics and how it is applied to everyday life and the governance of Australia" (Economics)*

For some students this was a continuing involvement with an area of interest, while for others a chance to "reconnect" or learn something they had always wanted to learn.

- *"An opportunity to sing with a choir again after a lapse of several years" (Choir)*
- *"A long-time interest, but no opportunity to learn German at school and this course suggested it could cope with a beginner" (German Language & Culture)*
- *"I always wanted to learn water colour painting, and now I have the time" (Watercolour Painting)*

Students in the Humanities/Social Sciences and Creative courses more notably expressed their attraction in terms of their broad love of the area, while those studying Languages and Mind-games emphasised the learning and skill component.

- *"My need to learn Italian, especially grammar which I always find difficult" (Post-beginners Italian)*
- *"The challenge of a difficult game and the opportunity to learn more about the theory" (Chess)*

The reputation of the tutor or the course itself was an important factor for 10% students, who had either heard about the class from friends or been previously enrolled in the course. The tutor's skill and approach to the class was a strong pull for some.

- *"The news from other people how all admire the tutor and the program, especially the time and preparation she puts in " (French Conversation)*

This was noted more often by Humanities/Social Sciences and creative activities students, where the interest was perhaps more general than in other types of courses.

- *"I had heard about the discussion the tutor engenders, and liked that a lot"* (Wisdom of the Ages)
- *"Past experience- the choice of songs and reliability of exceptional tutor"* (Choir)

The small class size and the presence of "likeminded" people was an attraction for 8% students, who felt this was an ideal environment for learning and pursuing their interest.

- *"The opportunity to socialise, to speak and be with other people of similar experiences"* (English Conversation)
- *"A number of people at the same level, all enthusiastic about further study"* (Advanced Italian)
- *"A small group interested in the same thing and the friendships around the activity separate from other things in my life"* (Wednesday Writers)

A similar percent (8%) of students chose their course for the challenge of learning something new or stimulating their mind, this being particularly noted by language and mind-game students.

- *"I have wished to become a little literate in this field. It's an area completely foreign from all my other interests"* (Economics)
- *"Mental stimulus and the liking for languages"* (Post-beginners Italian)
- *"Using my brains by playing a game that requires concentration"* (Mah-jong Tuesday)

A small group (5%) were attracted for specific personal reasons, such as travel preparation, family relationships, and the member's own health. These factors were especially associated with the language courses.

- *"I need to learn basic Japanese as travelling to Japan to an area where it is unlikely that anyone speaks English."* (Japanese Basic)
- *"To improve my memory and play chess with my children"* (Chess)
- *"Health reasons- need for stretching exercises"* (Yoga)

For another small group of students (5%) access in terms of time or affordability, or availability of the specific course was the major attraction.

- *"There was no Japanese offered at the Geelong u3a"* (Japanese)
- *"The time of the day and day of the week suited me "* (Spanish- Advanced)
- *"The possibility of continuing with Italian after CAE became too expensive".* (Advanced Italian)

Match between the course description and its delivery

Given these attractions to the course, how well did the actual course content and presentation match the advertised course description?

For over three quarters (79%) of students responding to this question, the answer was "very well" (5/5) and further 16 % rated the match highly at 4/5. Only a minority of respondents however elaborated on their rating.

- *"It is exactly that. Conversation is what we participate in, and we have all grown in confidence and participation"* (English Conversation).
- *"The course does for me exactly what I expected: ie not focus on a specific pre-knowledge of French, but rather a "re-awakening" what had been learnt in the distant past."* (French Re-connection)

- *"Matches very well- the instruction is excellent, so detailed and individual."* (Botanical Art)

Several students noted the evolving nature of the course, often dependent on the students enrolled. Alternatively, some professed little recollection of the description or interest in it originally.

- *"The material and speed of content dependent on the attributes of the other beginners"* (French Beginners)
- *"Never saw a course description. The level and content has evolved"* (Japanese Language & Culture)
- *"I never read the course description"* (Advanced Italian)

Most students who commented emphasised however the quality and benefits of the course.

- *"Since I was a complete novice, the course enabled me to know the moves, and enjoy the game with enough confidence to play with various levels of opponents in the class"* (Chess)
- *"I looked forward with pleasure to the course and was delighted with the presentation, the content, the degree of challenge and a teacher who spoke slowly and clearly; and had infinite patience with stumbling students"* (French Conversation)

Only a few students voiced their dissatisfaction with how the course was actually delivered, in contrast to its description. For example:

- *"It moves quicker than I expected"* (Post-beginners Italian)
- *"What began as a good lecture series is all too often side-tracked with various other topics by the enthusiastic vocal minority."* (History of the World)

The aspect of the course most enjoyed (Q4)

To the open question asking what they most enjoyed about their course, students provided a variety of responses that were somewhat dependent upon the nature of their course, although the camaraderie of the class and the tutor's contribution were factors common to all groups.

Of Language students' responses (n=130), the main aspects nominated were the class interaction and discussion (15%), camaraderie within the group (16%).

- *" Good interaction between students and lots of interesting and informative discussion"* (Japanese Language & Culture)
- *"The friendship of the diverse group of German speaking people, different backgrounds, is fascinating"* (German Language group)

For many the structure and variety of class activities (14%), and the tutor's approach or native origins (15%) were highlighted.

- *"Very pleased with the variety and course content, which has been comprehensive and directed at a level which is easy to follow considering this is such a difficult language to learn"* (Japanese Basic)
- *"She (name) is a delightful teacher, always so polite about our mistake. It is a privilege to have a native speaker"* (French Re-connection)

A number specified the emphasis on grammar and pronunciation (10%), conversation practice (14%), reading (2%), and the cultural components of the course (2%).

- *"The emphasis on listening and correct pronunciation, but sufficient input on vocab and grammar" (French Conversation)*
- *"The conversation and the fact that each week we read different materials" (Advanced Italian)*
- *"I particularly enjoyed learning something of the History of the World and culture, and loved the German lieder" (German Language & Culture)*

Others commented more generally on their enjoyment in the brain challenge of the class level (6%), their mastery of the language (5%).

- *"The challenge, the new friends and beginning to master the language" (Beginners French)*

Overwhelmingly responses from Humanities/Social Science students (n=106) identified the core activity and subsequent discussion as the aspect they most enjoyed (31%). The capacity to discuss or comment of the initial presentation, text or DVD appeared central to a student's enjoyment.

- *"I enjoy most the discussion of current affairs and linking that in with the course theory- so in other words linking the practical to the theory" (Economics)*
- *"Seeing good movies and discussing them with the group afterwards" (Movies of Merit)*

Many others (15%) stated they most enjoyed the various resources chosen by the tutor, such as movies, books, texts, audiovisuals; or the overall variety in the course content and presentation (12%).

- *"The wide range of sources that Mr Weiss seeks out, to present material not readily available" (The Weiss Report)*
- *"Videos of the plays" (Shakespeare)*
- *"The variety of films- I liked the format" (Movies of Merit)*

A smaller group most enjoyed the company of like-minded people (7%), and the tutor's knowledge and approach (4%).

- *"Meeting friends with like minds" (Philosophical Issues)*
- *"(Name) comprehension of every aspect of his lectures; his mode of conducting the class, the use of videos and reference books- a truly gifted teacher" (History of the World)*

In some instances (15%) students nominated a particular topic area as the aspect they most enjoyed, such as learning about the Ancient world or government budgets. For some they couldn't distinguish a most enjoyable aspect- claiming they enjoyed it all (9%).

In contrast, students in the Creative courses nominated the empathy and commonality among class members as the thing they most enjoyed (29%: n=100). This was closely followed by enjoyment in the actual creative activity itself, be it singing, painting, drawing or writing (23%).

- *"Getting together with like minded small group of people and creating something beautiful" (Floristry)*
- *"Encouragement and support to continue writing from other writers" (Wednesday Writers)*
- *"The singing! Choice of songs lyrical and lovely" (Choir)*
- *"The wide variety of crafts and the company of like minded people" (Craft group)*

The self-tutoring approach of many of these courses was also reflected in comments valuing feedback on work produced (12%), the variety and capacity to choose what they personally created (6%).

- *"There is no tutor but we tend to help each other. It forces me to spend at least this time each week on painting and has given me an incentive to improve"* (Watercolour Painting)
- *"I like the spontaneity of the responses to different pieces of writing. I do enjoy the variety of writing"* (Monday Writers)

In some instances students said they most enjoyed gaining new knowledge or skills (12%), or the tutor's contribution (7%). Then again, some loved it all (11%).

- *"I enjoy seeing improvement in my work having one to one tuition in a small group"* (Botanical Art)
- *"My expanded knowledge and enjoyment of a wide range (in time and place) of choral music"* (Choir)
- *"The sensitivity of the teacher and her deep knowledge of yoga"* (Yoga)

Similarly, students in Brain-game courses said they most enjoyed playing their particular game and the challenge it entailed (27%: n=62).

- *"Analysing the game whilst playing, and also playing with various people of different strength in the game"* (Chess)
- *"Brain challenge and companionship"* (Cryptic Crosswords)

They equally enjoyed the helpful and friendly atmosphere among members of the class (27%), despite often differences in skill levels.

- *"Working as a group to solve crosswords"* (Cryptic Crosswords)
- *"The helpfulness of more experienced players and the abiding friendliness"* (Mah-jong Friday)

Mastery of the theory and skills of the game was also an important source of enjoyment for some (18%), along with enjoyment in the tutor's approach (15%) and the brain challenge involved (6%).

- *"The intricacies of the game so well explained"* (Mah-jong Friday)
- *"I very much enjoy the theory of chess, and each week we have the option of learning new tactics at the start or playing for the full 2 hours"* (Chess)

What students liked about the way classes were run (Q6)

This question sought to explore students' views about what worked for them in the way their course was delivered. Responses were lower to this open question (n=285) as some students may have thought their earlier comment captured this, or they failed to turn over the page of the survey.

The themes highlighted by students overall were the informality and friendliness of the class (31%), the class structure, activity mix and organisation (23%), the tutor's professionalism, enthusiasm and knowledge (15%) or patience and support (7%). The egalitarian nature of the class (15%) and the shared responsibility between members for skill development or leadership (5%), was specifically identified as important by others. A small group (4%) nominated a particular aspect of their class organisation, such as the music selected or the entirety of the class being in the language taught.

These factors reinforce and expand on the comments students made in Q4 about what they most enjoyed about the course.

The *friendliness, informality and relaxed nature of classes* was important for all student groups, but strongly identified by those in Brain-games and Creative courses. (Brain games-39%; Creative –35%; Languages- 29%; Humanities/Social Sciences-24%)

- "The welcoming and friendliness that emanate from the class, even if you are a poor player like me" (Chess)
- "Friendly atmosphere- casual, no pressure- but still guidance" (Botanical Drawing)
- "Friendly atmosphere, lots of laughs and encouragement" (Advanced Italian)
- "The informality- easy to and fro with questions and comments" (Economics)

Responses focusing on the *egalitarian and inclusive nature of the class* complement those more general ones above about class camaraderie and informality, and were more often stated by students in the Humanities/Social Sciences courses where respect for others contribution appeared an important part of class discussion (Humanities/Social Sciences-27%, Languages-12%, Creative -10%, Brain games -10%)

- "Includes class participants and respectful of each person's ideas" (Shakespeare)
- "Excellent the way the tutor encourages everyone to have their say and is non-judgemental" (Wisdom of the Ages)
- "The class was run in such a way that each person has a chance to ask questions" (Beginners French)"
- "Very participative- lots of encouragement and positive support between members" (Wednesday Writers)
- "The fact that top chess players are willing to play with lesser experienced ones" (Chess)

The *good organisation, class structure and variety of activities* were a highly valued aspect of course delivery, especially important to students in Language and Brain-game courses, where progressive skill development is perhaps a greater feature. (Brain games-35%, Languages-28%, Humanities/Social Sciences-16%, Creative-14%)

- "The mix of learning new rules/hands and playing" (Mah-jong Tuesday)
- "I thought they were well structured- little time was wasted and there was a free flow of ideas, with the time shared evenly among the group" (Advanced Italian)
- "I like the diversity of the things we do- grammar, conversation, reading" (French L5)
- "Tutor kept the class on track. Personal opinions were kept to minimum and politics kept at bay" (Economics)
- "It was well organised- lots of information given and notes on the web to read" (Western Intellectual Tradition)

The tutor's contribution in achieving such outcomes was more directly commented on by students who identified the *tutor's professionalism, knowledge and enthusiasm* as what they liked most about the way the class was run, this being more so for Humanities/Social Sciences students (Humanities/Social Sciences-21%, Languages-14%, Creative-11%, Brain games-10%)

- "Tutor has good experience and knowledge" (Wisdom of the Ages)
- "Very patient teacher, with good class plan, good preparation, good materials and sensible homework" (French Re-connection)
- "Very professional- tutor is always polite and pleasant" (Floristry)

For other students, the *tutor's patience, support* and capacity to work with people of varying skill or confidence levels was particularly appreciated (Languages –12%, Creative-11%, Humanities/Social Sciences-4%)

- *"She does an excellent job. I admire her patience with disorganised students who can't find the page and don't know subjects from objects" (German Language & Culture)*
- *"Tutor's clear explanation and skill at coping with different levels in the class" (Post-beginners Italian)*
- *"The teacher does not expect students to go beyond their limit of capacity, which is greatly appreciated" (Yoga)*

A number of courses are self-facilitated and for some students, especially in creative and language courses, the shared responsibility and cooperation was noted as what they liked most about the class delivery.

- *Very democratic- we take it in turns to run the class and set topics" (Monday Writers)*
- *"We are free to 'do our own thing' if we like or ask for help or ideas from each other" (Craft group)*

Opportunity to Participate in class

Students were asked if they had the opportunity to participate in the class as much as they would have liked. Not surprisingly given the comments reported above, 97% students responding to this question stated "Yes", they had.

Comments, where provided, reiterated the themes noted above regarding the tutor's support and encouragement of participation, the class format that builds in participation, the respect credited members regardless of ability or background, and the tutor's control of the class that enables fair and equal participation. Several students additionally noted that the small class size was conducive to participation.

- *"Small class size makes for easy participation" (Japanese Language & Culture)*

Only a handful of students (3%) said that they had not been able to participate as much as they would have liked. Two of these noted illness/personal circumstances as the reason for this, while another commented that she had been on the class waiting list for a long time. One student expressed frustration at his own slow progress that meant he could not participate as he would like, while another noted that the "better ones" have most participation. Several others reported frustration at dominance of their class by a vocal few who were not reigned in by the tutor.

Satisfaction with the number and frequency of classes in the course

Students were asked to rate and comment on their satisfaction with the frequency and number of classes in their course. Of the 322 responses, 85% said they were very satisfied and a further 11% gave a 4/5 rating.

Only a minority of students commented on their rating. Most indicated that the weekly class throughout the year (with breaks as relevant) worked well in terms of learning and engagement.

- *"Weekly is a good interval- there is time to reflect and attend to homework. It would be wonderful if they went on forever, but then people go on holidays and the breaks allowed for this" (French Conversation)*

- *"I enjoy meeting each week as it keeps me in touch and provides a structure to my social interaction apart from regular activities with friends and family" (Wednesday Writers)*

Others noted that weekly sessions suited their personal situation, given age, health and other commitments:

- *"Any more would be a burden for me, as I also take another course" (French Re-connection)*
- *"I have a lot of work to do around the home and therefore the number of sessions and frequency of classes is right for me" (Chess)*

Several students acknowledged that meeting more frequently would be an imposition on volunteer tutors.

- *Given the teaching is voluntary, the frequency and number of sessions is generous" (Japanese Language & Culture)*
- *Yes, many hours are spent by our tutor in preparation to help us along" (French Conversation)*

Although well satisfied, a number of students expressed a preference for term holiday breaks in their course.

- *"Maybe holiday breaks to fit in with schools would be good as have grandchildren" (French L5)*
- *"While I don't think there is a need for a break for all school holidays, a mid-year break of a couple of weeks would help maintain enthusiasm" (French L6)*

Of those reporting moderate satisfaction (4%), several Language students indicated a preference for twice weekly classes or longer class time to enable greater practice.

- *"Possibly longer class time or extra classes in conjunction for conversational French (Beginners French)*
- *"Twice a week would be good- but probably not practical" (Japanese Language & Culture)*
- *"I would prefer to have a 2 hour lesson. I find that 1.5 hours is too short" (Japanese Basic)*

A desire for greater frequency was voiced by some students whose classes meet on a fortnightly basis:

- *"I'm satisfied, but I would prefer this session to be held every week" (English Conversation)*
- *"Pity it is not more regular and each session is so short compared to what it was formerly" (The Weiss Report)*

Suggested changes to course content (Q5)

Students were asked if they had any suggestions for changes in what the course covered. Almost two thirds (61%) said "No" or left the question blank, and a further 22% qualified their "no" response with comments that expanded on their satisfaction with the current content.

These responses noted the variety or thoroughness of the existing content, the specificity of the subject matter so that the tutor's judgment was best relied upon for texts and content selection, and the evolving nature of what is covered in consultation with the students.

- *"With a repertoire that is different for each concert, it is difficult to improve on course content" (Choir)*

- *Good content- language very well covered and the cultural area diverse and fascinating.* (Japanese Language & Culture)
- *"The books for this course have been written by former chess champions and therefore it would be difficult to improve"* (Chess)
- *The content is determined in consultation with the students and changes as required* (French L6)

Others commented more generally on the excellence of the course content, their enjoyment in the subject matter and saw no need to alter something that is working well.

- *"I enjoy the course so much, there is not anything that needs to change"* (Yoga)
- *"The Weiss Report is unique and valuable. Let it stay that way"* (The Weiss Report)

Responses from the 17% students who made suggestions about change were however not all targeted at the course content- being equally divided between ideas regarding the content and suggestions about changes in how the course could be run (pre-empting the later Q8).

Suggestions regarding content were understandably course specific- ideas that the individual tutor can reflect on in future course planning. A sample is illustrated here.

For example, individual Language students suggested more (or less) coverage of grammar and pronunciation; more emphasis on spoken language; the inclusion of more poetry, current issues or travel topics; the addition of outside-classroom events as part of the course.

- *"Omit French book and put greater emphasis on tourism survival skills"* (French L5)
- *"Could include social events, such as a French restaurant and French films"* (Beginners French)

Economics students made a number of suggestions- the inclusion of new economic thinkers; more on the History of economics and key thinkers; greater focus on politics; and a greater linking the economic theory to practice.

- *"Historical concepts eg Adam Smith, Marx, Keynes and the Neo-liberals"*
- *"I would like to explore new thinking eg Hawker's Natural Capitalism. Who are the new gurus in the field?"*

Similarly, Choir members made several suggestions about songs in the future repertoire- including more light songs from stage and screen; opera choruses; modern songs; or by specific composers.

- *"I would love to sing some Bach, Handel, Brahms and opera choruses. But I also like the traditional and popular songs we are singing now".*

Suggested changes to how the course is run and organised

Students were asked for their suggestions about changes to the way the course is presented or organised. Again the vast majority of students (85%) indicated that there was no need for change to the existing way their course was run. Some added that they were happy with the status quo, while others commended the organisation of the course, the pace and format of the class, the capacity to cater for various skill levels.

- *"It caters for beginners as well as regular players, so it's difficult to see how it could be improved"* (Chess)

- *"At present the course is run for two hours with a short break after an hour. This suits me and I find the time is just enough for our group. I don't see any need to change how the course is organised or run" (Wednesday Writers)*
- *"I think it is pitched just right and has held the participants interest and involvement for over two and a half years" (English Conversation)*

A number of students also commented positively on the class exercises, activities and homework, as well as the handouts or course outline provided by the tutor.

- *"I'm personally very happy with the way the tutor runs this class. She cheerfully adjusts her pace to suit us, and the textbook fulfils my needs. We get carefully prepared handouts, and she takes great care to correct our homework" (French Re-connection)*
- *"As a new student I have been impressed with the amount of exercises and homework one can do" (Japanese Language & Culture)*

The tutor's existing consultation with students about how the course is run was again noted.

- *"Class members have made suggestions, with tutor encouragement, as the year has progressed" (French L6)*

Fifteen per cent of students made a suggestion for changes to their course's organisation or delivery. Suggestions covered a range of issues relating to various class activities, resources and equipment, the degree of structure and length of classes, and general course organisation. For example:

A number of students commented that they would like greater use of audio-visual equipment in their course, and noted the need for reliable equipment and tutors being conversant with how equipment operates.

- *"Ideally some audiovisual content might help, but the discussion is just right" (Philosophical Issues)*
- *"Perhaps school to provide means to hear and see Japanese conversation" (Japanese Language & Culture)*
- *"The use of audiovisual material could be very helpful. I wonder whether language course tutors could be trained in the use of video projectors" (Beginners French)*

Some students requested more handouts or class notes to assist learning, although it was noted by one person that students could be encouraged to take their own notes in class. Several suggested that being given reference reading in advance of the next class would help understanding and foster better discussion.

- *"Some written notes on the different films shown would be welcome" (Movies of Merit)*
- *"Suggested reading to accompany the lectures, which would enhance the interest and focus question time" (History of the World)*

The degree of homework was another common area of comment- some students wanting more, others less.

- *"Handouts are good. Maybe some light homework would be a challenge" (Economics)*
- *"I would be happy to have some homework" (German Language Group)*
- *"Perhaps written homework would be good" (Chess)*
- *"At times there is too much homework. The volume could be spread over two weeks to complete, rather than one" (French Re-connection)*

An emphasis on basics, revision and a slower pace for beginners was suggested across a range of courses to enhance learning.

- *"More emphasis on Volume1 before going to Volume 2" (Chess)*
- *"I need some basic painting exercises on what paint does" (Botanical Painting)*
- *"I would like to go a bit more slowly, but then I realise there are many different levels in the class (Post-beginners Italian)*
- *"More revision on a weekly basis" (Japanese Basic)*

Language students particularly made suggestions about the spoken aspect of the course- a greater emphasis on oral exercises and different approaches, for example rotation of partners and introduction of role-playing.

- *"More role-plays to be prepared 2 by 2, using what we are supposed to know" (Italian Post-beginners)*
- *"I would welcome more written and spoken exercises to help consolidate language learning" (English Conversation)*
- *"Perhaps a conversational component " (Japanese Language & Culture)*

While these and other suggestions were specific ones that can be considered by the individual tutor, several others related to the course program as a whole. For example, our relationship with Ross House; the need for a tutor instead of self-lead classes, or a native speaker for language courses; and the information given to students at enrolment.

- *"Of course it would be nice if we had a tutor!" (Watercolour Painting)*
- *"While the group works well at present, I often wish for the presence of a native speaker- that is, another class, not replacing this one" (Advanced Italian)*
- *"It would help to know the text books required after acceptance into the course" (Beginners French)*
- *"Better liaison between U3A office and Ross House as to room reservation" (The Weiss Report)*

Additional comments about their course

Students were given the opportunity to make any further comments about their course in an open question (Q10). Over a third (39%) chose to do so, raising new issues or emphasising their earlier comments.

New issues (26% of comments) related primarily to course administration and planning matters that group into 3 areas: courses on offer, student management, and accommodation.

Regarding courses, several students in language classes noted the need for beginner classes at a more introductory level than currently offered. Additionally others expressed the wish that their course would progress to a new level next year, rather than taking in new beginners, thereby creating/continuing the disparity in skill levels within the class. The need for native speaking language tutors was again mentioned and a number of students expressed the fervent wish that their course be re-offered in 2011, noting the longevity of the course or need to continue their learning.

- *"I felt the course was a bit beyond my ability. A more beginners course would have been more suitable for me" (English Conversation)*
- *"I hope the course continues next year, and continues to the next level and does not revert to beginners again" (French Beginners)*

Student management touched on a number of issues: class size; the need for a guaranteed place so that skill learning could be consolidated and progress from the present course; that new students be given a trial to see how the course suits them, or in the case of languages be expected to be familiar with the areas already covered.

- *"It would be good to be able to continue from this class to next year- i.e. to be guaranteed a place" (French Beginners)*
- *"I think next year, new students should know the class has covered a number of chapters in the text and should be encouraged to do the levels beforehand" (French Re-connection)*

Several comments related to the need for fairness by students- that those who attend irregularly notify the office so that the wait list can be progressed; that talkative members give others the opportunity to participate; that tolerance to new/beginners be practised; and respect shown for other students while waiting or exiting classrooms where classes run back to back.

- *"People who don't turn up regularly should be asked to leave" (French L6)*
- *"If adults act like children, maybe a reminder is necessary that manners are required. I have already spoken about the noise from the class waiting to attend" (Yoga)*

Accommodation issues raised problems regarding the size of the current classroom; proximity and noise from other rooms; lack of a consistent room throughout the year; and the need to plan and pay for audiovisual equipment at the Multi-Cultural Hub. To overcome some of these issues, one student suggested that the class was willing to contribute to room hire costs.

- *"Sometimes the classroom is too small and I can hear the next doors teaching" (Japanese Basic)*

Where reiterating comments made earlier in the survey, one group of students emphasised the expertise and contribution of their tutor, while the majority restated their enjoyment of the course, the learning achieved and friendships made.

- *"I am glad this feedback gives me the opportunity to thank our course tutors for their dedication and enthusiasm, as well as their professionalism in conducting this course with people of many different backgrounds" (Chess)*
- *"It's a great way to meet other U3A people and the chance of friendships- at our age very precious" (Philosophical Issues)*
- *"As a result of the tutor's wide knowledge in music, I have been exposed to an ever increasing number of choral pieces, both classical and of the lighter variety" (Choir)*
- *"Absolutely wonderful- the language, discussion, laughter- the feel good one gets from the class" (Shakespeare)*

Comments about the overall U3A course program

When asked if they had any comments to make about the course program generally (Q11), just under half the students (43%) chose to comment.

A majority of those responding commented on the excellence of the various courses they personally attended and the overall program offered by U3A Melbourne City.

- *"A great program, thoughtfully put together" (Botanical Drawing)*
- *"It is an excellent program. The only problem I have is not being able to fit in all the things I would like to do" (Advanced Italian)*

A sizable group also noted positively the diversity and wonderful choices provided to members within the range of courses offered, while others commented on the affordability and access for all seniors to such a valuable educational program.

- *"U3A is a wonderful opportunity for all us seniors, the program is diverse with many opportunities and choices. I hope this will continue to grow" (Japanese Basic)*
- *"I really appreciate all the effort which enables Third Age students to keep on learning at low cost, suitable times and friendly places" (French Re-connection)*
- *"Overall excellent. What a wonderful resource for all people of all walks of life" (Economics)*

Expanding these themes, a few members also made suggestions for the planning of future courses – in terms of specific course interests; timing and style of courses; and the dissatisfaction they experienced with wait-lists and conditions within Ross House.

Topics of interest included: Fine Arts/Art History and Interior Decoration; Music Appreciation (Opera and classics); Play reading, Theatre and Ballet; Film appreciation and documentary type movies; different Crafts (Patchwork); European and other History; more courses on Asia- especially India and China; Intermediate and Beginners Italian classes; Tai Chi and more on Health; a walking group and more generally "fun" activities.

Several students requested more short courses, and others the provision of classes that cater for members with special needs.

- *"U3A in general does not seem to be geared to visually impaired people" (English Conversation)*
- *"Because of my condition I can't do morning classes often, whereas most U3Aers seem happy with mornings" (Mah-jong Friday)*

A number of students praised the dedication of the volunteers- tutors and all the "behind the scenes" people within U3A that made the program possible, or commented on the overall excellence of U3A Melbourne as an organisation.

- *"I congratulate all concerned. The variety of courses, the tremendous amount of work done by the office and tutors- all on a voluntary basis and with limited resources. We are very lucky to be part of U3A Melbourne" (Movies of Merit)*
- *"U3A is a great organisation and I am encouraging more friends to join" (Wisdom of the Ages)*
- *"U3A is a great boon- always challenging, and enables us to participate in many thought provoking courses" (Shakespeare)*

Additionally, the value of the U3A program's contribution to seniors' health and wellbeing and society as a whole was emphasised by several members.

- *"I think the U3A and all it has to offer is a fabulous opportunity for people of a certain age to stretch their minds. I am deeply grateful for all that is being done" (Chess)*
- *"The craft group satisfies the creative passion of members, and the friendship is invaluable to each person. The state government should pay us to attend the class- it keeps us physically and mentally stimulated and out of the need to provide us with nursing homes and care; and we add to the country's economy with our craft purchases" (Craft)*

Discussion

Students participating in the feedback process have expressed a very high level of satisfaction and enjoyment in the course they attend, the overall program of educational

courses provided and U3A Melbourne as an organisation. This would indicate that a quality yearlong program is being provided by a skilled and dedicated group of volunteer tutors, and behind-the-scenes course organisers. It would suggest that U3A Melbourne is making a significant contribution to lifelong-learning by seniors and contributing in no small part to their wellbeing.

What is striking is the consistency of comments across various courses about the aspects students most enjoyed about their course and the way the course was organised and run. Importantly, these comments indicate that the course program is being delivered in line with core principles of Adult Learning. In particular, the value students placed on the friendly, informal classroom atmosphere; on the stimulation of discussion and level of participation enjoyed; on class camaraderie; and on the tutors respect and support of their learning all reflect best practice approaches such as outlined below.

The differences in learning between adults and younger students are well known, and educators point to the need for teaching approaches to acknowledge and work with these. Consider then the reported findings in light of the following Adult Learning principles and approaches¹:

- *Adults are autonomous and self-directed learners*- so teachers must adopt a collaborative approach that actively involves them in the learning process and planning topics or activities. Teachers should serve as facilitators to student learning rather than the supplier of facts, which may include sharing responsibility for presentations and group leadership.
- *Adults have a foundation of life experiences and knowledge*- thus more meaningful and effective learning is promoted when this is drawn out, accepted and used as a resource for new learning.
- *Adults will learn best in an atmosphere that is non-threatening* and supportive of experimentation, and recognises different learning styles and pace of learning. This is facilitated when the teacher establishes a friendly, open atmosphere in class and teaching activities promote question asking/answering; provide positive reinforcement; do not demand finalised, correct answers, and tolerate uncertainty or hesitancy
- *Adults need to be shown respect*- they should be treated as equals in experience and actively encouraged to participate, voicing their questions/opinions freely in class without risk of looking stupid.

There is notable congruence between these principles and how students reported their course to be operating.

Similarly, students' positive feedback on the structure and mix of course activities, and their suggestions for change to how the course is run (such as home work, class activities and exercises, audiovisual resources etc) highlight other best practice approaches. For example:

¹ These principles are compiled from various online sources, including: NSW International Centre for VET Teaching and Learning- Adult Learners and Learning: A-Z Resources; Stephen Lieb, "Principles of Adult Learning", VISION, Fall 1991; Peter Wegner, "Principles of Adult Education", University of Queensland; Tammy Dewar, "Adult Learning Principles- a selection", 1999, Adult Learning Online; NSW Health, "Principles of adult learning and education", 2003 HepC Project Trainers Manual.

- *Arousal and interest are important for adult learning-* learning is voluntary, thus understanding individual motivation for learning is important, and sustaining interest by class topics and activities that are relevant, diverse, sufficiently (but not too) challenging and stimulate various senses.
- *Adult learning is promoted by doing rather than theory-* the practical application of new knowledge or skills is necessary; summaries of what has been learned, specific feedback on their progress and sufficient practice and repetition is vital to help students retain what they have learned.

Students' comments would indicate that on the whole tutors work to offer a range of relevant and stimulating class activities and in some courses set and conscientiously provide feedback on homework. Where students did express a wish for a change in specific class activities, tutors should be now encouraged to consider and discuss these suggestions with the whole class.

A greater use by tutors of audiovisual equipment, as suggested by some students, would better cater for different learning modalities and diversity of class activities. It would however have implications for stock and maintenance of equipment; classroom noise within Ross House; and training of tutors in the use of various resources. The issue is one that could be raised and addressed within future Tutors meetings or workshops.

Finally, the reasons students gave for being attracted to the course give us some insight into their motivation for learning and commitment to the course. This information can assist tutors in engaging students and tailoring classes to their goals and needs. It has been suggested that adults are motivated in their learning by a number of factors including: enhancing social relationships, a cognitive interest, a change from other life demands, personal development, career advancement, and acquiring knowledge/skills to better contribute to the community. In the case of our senior students, it would appear that the earlier factors are more important, given the particular emphasis on pursuing a longstanding study interest, stimulation and the social aspects of attending a course.

Discussions at the Tutors Workshops held earlier in 2010 have highlighted many of these best practices identified above. The present findings will further reinforce the importance of active, flexible and participatory approaches to teaching within the U3A framework and provide tutors with encouragement to maintain and develop these approaches within their course.

Planning and course administration use of suggestions and comments

The overall thrust of student comments and specific suggestions regarding the program also provides valuable information for the Course Coordination team in recruiting and planning future courses. Our goal of providing regular weekly classes, across a diversity of topics and progressive skill levels, where relevant, is highly valued by students.

The list of suggested topics indicates some gaps in our current program, especially in the Arts/Performing Arts and Health areas, where proactive recruitment could be explored. Similarly, the options regarding native speaking language teachers and the expertise of tutors (as distinct from group leaders) in skill based courses can be kept in mind when considering and negotiating future courses.

The wish for more short courses, expressed by several students, supports our growing emphasis on short courses as a strategy to attract new tutors and enable members to pursue or try out a range of different interests in the year.

The provision of a break in yearlong courses, be it school holidays or other times, is valued by a number of students enabling them to retain their enthusiasm or attend to other commitments. As such, the issue should be raised in planning future yearlong courses with individual tutors, and potentially could more broadly be considered in terms of providing office volunteers with a similar break, especially mid-year.

Issues raised in relation to student management and accommodation echo those expressed previously by individual students and at Tutors Meetings. The dilemmas of priority of access for continuing students versus fairness of access to all courses for other members, especially new ones, is much debated by Course Administration. Priority for members who contribute as volunteers in keeping with the self-help spirit of the U3A further adds to the issue. While we attempt to expand the number of classes to accommodate student demand, class placement is challenged by the growth in membership, such that wait-lists and 'no guarantees' remain issues to be grappled with in the future.

Knowing if the course is right for a member and introducing new members to an ongoing class are matters also previously discussed at Tutors Meetings. Provisions exist for tutors to contact an applicant to discuss what has already been covered and judge their suitability before acceptance into a course. Similarly trial attendance can be organised by Course Administration with the tutor's agreement, provided there is not a waiting list for the course. Clarifying these provisions for members and tutors in the Newsletter and Tutors handbook may encourage greater use of these approaches so as to reduce some of the difficulties experienced.

Additionally, stronger reiteration in the Newsletter and Handbook of the need for respect and fairness towards other students would address the problems of disruptive changeovers between classes and overly dominant class members. This should also encourage irregular attendees (drop-outs) and tutors to inform the Office about non-attendance so that places in the course can be freed up for other members, especially where there is a wait-list.

Difficulties voiced regarding classroom size, consistency and noise are being addressed by Course Administration and the Committee in booking rooms for the 2011 courses, and the overall priority given to accommodation issues in the organisation's new three-year Strategy Plan.

Some limitations

While the overwhelmingly positive feedback from students about their course is extremely encouraging in terms of tutor affirmation and program quality, the limitations of the findings must also be acknowledged. Firstly, students appeared very conscious of the voluntary nature of the tutor/leaders role and the time and generosity involved in running the class. As such some students may have been reluctant to express criticisms of the course or make suggestions for change, compared to a paid instructor situation.

That reluctance may have been further compounded by the distribution and collection process itself, which involved the tutor directly rather than a more separate process administered via the U3A office (such as email or postal survey). Sensitivity to the tutor's reaction on reading any negative feedback, especially by an identified participant, may have deterred some members from making forthright comments. This was a factor considered in designing the feedback procedure, but considered secondary to empowering tutors through direct involvement and the opportunity to read and discuss the feedback with students prior to handing in the completed forms.

A more major limitation is the lack of feedback from students who were not present during the survey time or who had dropped out of the course earlier in the year. Despite a high response rate (84%) for students currently attending, this represents less than 50% of students enrolled in the courses involved. Members may have dropped out for various reasons, including dissatisfaction with the course, thereby "voting with their feet" as one tutor describes it.

Although "drop-outs" are phoned to confirm their withdrawal, there are no reasons recorded for their discontinuance or any indication of their satisfaction with the course. If the program is to be assured of offering quality courses that meet the needs and expectations of members, feedback from students who have discontinued should be sought to provide a more complete picture of students' experience of the program offered.

With the increasing retirement of many baby-boomers, whose interests and expectations may be different from earlier retirees, future course planning and delivery could also be informed by more in-depth discussion with members who belong to this cohort. Engagement with these two groups of members would do much to overcome some of the limitations of this current student feedback response.

Conclusions

The participation in this initial feedback survey by a high number of tutors and the vast majority of students attending classes during the feedback period is a strong endorsement of the new Student Feedback Policy. It has given students a formal, recognised voice in reflecting on our educational program and helping to shape its future.

Students have used this opportunity to convey how much they enjoy the courses offered and their admiration of the professionalism of the volunteer tutors and group leaders. Their comments on the way the courses are delivered and the aspects they most enjoy indicate that overall tutors and group leaders adopt best practice approaches in running their classes, and meet the needs and expectations of their students.

Such positive feedback suggests that a quality program is being provided to members that is affordable, accessible and tailored to seniors learning and social needs. The students' general comments on the U3A program and the reasons they attend would confirm this to be so.

A second aim of the Policy is to provide tutors/group leaders with information that would help them review and plan their course in the future. Students' comments have clearly identified the aspects of the course that work well, and in some instances have made

suggestions for change in either the content or delivery of the course. Tutors are now in a position to individually reflect on this feedback, and where appropriate make or discuss suggested changes with their class.

The Student Feedback Policy also aims to improve course planning, coordination and administration based on the feedback from students. As discussed above, students' comments provide valuable information for recruitment and diversifying our course program; developing Tutor Workshops and other resources; and course administration practice.

Additionally, the data and richness of student comments provide a valuable resource for the organisation as a whole in promoting our program and in seeking funding and support in the wider community. As the fourth aim of the Policy, it is pleasing that already many comments have been used to promote U3A Melbourne City at our Seniors Week display and at our 2010 AGM.

As such, the feedback and the data in this report is a valuable resource at a number of levels. However, it is not the only story - tutors will, and should, continue to consult informally with their students about their course; members will provide ad hoc comments to the organisation; and the views of discontinuing students need to be sought.

Recommendations

To progress the usefulness of this first Student Feedback process, the following is recommended. That:

1. The Committee of Management make available this full report to all tutors, members and interested others via the U3A Melbourne City office and website.
2. The Executive Summary of this report be distributed to all tutors, the organisation's website and Newsletter, and other sources as appropriate (e.g. the U3A Network).
3. Tutors Meetings and Tutor Workshops discuss the findings of the survey- seeking tutors comments on specific suggestions and usefulness of the feedback received, and reinforcing identified best practice approaches.
4. Course Coordination and Course Administration teams consider and address relevant matters raised in respect to the development and organisation of U3A Melbourne City program.
5. The Committee of Management and the Promotions Working Party use the report findings and student comments to enhance their work in seeking funding and support, and promoting the organisation in the wider community.
6. The Committee of Management explores ways in which the views of students who withdraw from (or irregularly attend) courses can be captured in 2011.
7. A further snapshot survey of yearlong courses, as reported here, should be conducted again in three years time.

STUDENT COURSE FEEDBACK FORM

We encourage you to complete this form as it will help improve the overall program of classes and courses delivered by U3A Melbourne City. Your feedback will be treated confidentially and can be given anonymously. Please fold and give your form to the tutor today. If you prefer, you may return the form directly to our office.

Course name

Tutor's Name

Your name (Optional)

Date

(please circle)

	Not at all		Moderately		Very much
1. How much did you enjoy this course?	1	2	3	4	5

2. What attracted you to this course initially?

3. How well did the course content & presentation match the course description?	Not at all		Moderately		Very well
Please <u>comment</u> on your rating (eg adequacy of Description; match with style, level or content described)	1	2	3	4	5

4. What aspect of the course did you enjoy most?

5. Would you suggest any changes to the **course content** (what the classes covered)?
Eg What information or material could be added or left out?

6. What did you like about the way the classes were run?

Please comment

7. Did you have the opportunity to participate in the class as much as you would have liked? Yes No
Please comment

8. Would you suggest any changes to **how** the course was organised or run? (eg structure or pace of classes; social time; class exercises or homework; use of equipment; handouts provided) Please comment

9. How satisfied were you with the frequency and number of sessions in this course? Not at all Moderately Very
satisfied 1 2 3 4 5
Please comment

10. Are there any other comments you would like to make about this particular course?

11. Do you have any general comments about our U3A course program?

Thank you for your time and thought in filling in this form

Office use only

Short or Yearlong course

Number of sessions

Frequency

INTRODUCING THE FEEDBACK FORM TO YOUR CLASS

Thank you for participating in the new Student Feedback process. To help you and the U3A program get the most out of your students' input, we encourage you to give some thought as to how you will present the Form to your class. Here are some "tips".

Please:

- Tell the students *in advance* about the new Feedback Form, preferably the week before you give out the Forms (ie in your class at the end of July for yearlong courses and the 2nd last class for short-courses).
- Ask them to think about the course in the week between and maybe *jot down some thoughts*. This will make it easier for them to complete the Form in class.
- Let your class know that this is an important new way we are giving *all* students a voice, to have a say on the courses we run. We realise that our students vary greatly, so their *individual opinion* is valued.
- Emphasise the aim is to *help you as a tutor*, and the course coordination team, better understand and meet our members' *expectations and needs*.
- Say you want them to give you *their honest opinion*, and that this does not imply criticism or a lack of appreciation of your knowledge and hard work in teaching the course.
- Let them know that *constructive comments* can be helpful in how you plan and offer the course in future, and, in the overall promotion and planning of courses.
- On the distribution day, *please allow time* (5-10 mins) for hand-out and for students to complete the Form either during or at the end of class.
- Encourage students to complete all the "*Please comment*" sections and offer to clarify any queries they have about specific questions (see over).
- *Collect the Forms* at the end of the class. You can take them home to read over/note and return to the office the following week, or immediately read them and return to the office with your class roll.

Thank you for helping the program thrive and welcoming changes.

Each question aims to get student feedback on a different aspect of the course.

For example:

Q1 targets their overall opinion of the course offered- how much did they like it?

Q2 asks why did they enrol for this specific course? Reasons can vary within the class which can affect their interest, participation, learning or satisfaction.

Q3 targets the course description and how well it matches the course in action. Course descriptions are important in setting student expectations, and in getting students appropriate to the course. Feedback can help improve future descriptions.

Q4 is an open, affirming question that gives students the opportunity to say what they most liked about the course. This can be any aspect of the course eg. a topic area, opportunity to meet like minded people, hands-on experiences, discussion.

Q5 asks for potential changes to the Content of the course (not how it was run, this is targeted in Qs 6 – 9). For example, more/less emphasis on a particular area; more background information, or different order of presentation etc.

Q6 is an open, affirming question that asks students what they liked about how you ran the classes. This tells you what aspect/s of the classes worked well, eg: the mix of information and discussion; class notes or practical exercises; feeling welcomed when new; rotation of discussion leader. This will vary with the different types of course and different students.

Q7 asks how satisfied each student was with his/her opportunity to participate. An important aspect of adult education, this can however mean different things for different students, and can vary with the nature of the course. Eg the opportunity to ask questions, contribute to the discussion, inclusion in an activity, put up new ideas etc.

Q8 asks for potential changes to how you organise the course and run classes. For example, less information and more time for questions or discussion; more repetition or homework for some areas; a mid-way refresher/social break in class; use of guest speaker; a new activity; increase/decrease in class time.

Q9 targets the number and frequency of classes in the course. Students may be very happy with current arrangements or for example want more or less sessions in the course; more or less frequent classes; splitting or a continuation of a short course. This may reflect their personal preferences/circumstances or the amount of material and nature of the course, so encourage them to say *why* if they express dissatisfaction.

Q10 is an open question for any other comments about the course not covered above (and the trial-run suggests lots of positive appreciation for the tutors here)!

Q11 is an open question for any general comments about the overall course program eg suggestions for new courses/topics; preference for yearlong or short courses; interest in night or weekend classes; or appreciation for the great range of classes on offer.

Appendix- Additional comments illustrating themes

Initial attraction

Long held interest

- *“A long held interest in ancient History of the World” (History of the World)*
- *“A love of the Bards words” (Shakespeare)*

Desire to learn

- *“A desire to improve my French skills”. (French L5)*
- *I had a Mah-Jong set for many years and thought it would be good to learn to play again (Mah-jong Tuesday)*

Tutor's reputation

- *“The tutor's expertise and experience in the subject” (Economics)*
- *“My passion for writing and the group's leader- I respect her a lot” (Wednesday Writers)*

Likeminded people

- *“Singing with choral enthusiasts”. (Choir)*
- *“To continue to play the game in a very friendly atmosphere” (Mah-Jong Tuesday)*

Mental stimulation

- *“I thought, correctly, that it would be good for my brain. Also I love learning new things”. (Chess)*

Personal reasons

- *“To be able to speak better Italian as I would love to travel again in Italy.” (Post-beginners Italian)*

Course description match

Basis of high rating

- *“The course presentation is well balanced and matches the course description” (Chess)*
- *“It has met the description very well indeed. The preparation prior to the day and presentation is excellent” (Shakespeare)*

Unaware of course description

- *“Never saw a description, let alone its content” (Japanese)*

Quality & Benefits

- *“I found it very helpful in learning how the volatile economic situation we are living through is influenced by the various conditions here and in other countries” (Economics)*
- *“It exceeded my expectations as the leader's skill and readiness to share her knowledge, with her high expectations leads to an enjoyable mastery.” (Choir)*

Most enjoyed aspect

Interaction

- *“Meeting with people who obviously enjoy conversing with others in Spanish- Advanced” (Spanish- Advanced)*

Camaraderie

- *“I most enjoyed the friendly atmosphere and the possibility to express myself (English Conversation)*

The challenge

- *“The pressure at times to find the right word, and the good company too” (French 6)*

Activity & discussion

- *"The ability to discuss issues and questions raised by class members to gain a better understanding of the subject under consideration" (History of the World)*
- *"Taking part in the reading and discussing the text" (Shakespeare)*

Resources chosen & variety of content

- *"I enjoy the lectures and the various historical films" (History of the World)*
- *"The fact that a seemingly dull subject can be presented in a fresh and interesting way" (Economics)*

Like-minded people

- *"Fellow students and the calibre of the discussion" (Book Discussion)*

Friendly atmosphere

- *"The social side and the competitive side" (Mah-jong Tuesday)*

Tutor's approach

- *"The patient and knowledgeable approach of our instructor and the handouts every lesson" (Chess)*

What Like about way class runs

Friendliness & informality

- *"I like the relaxed atmosphere and friendly interaction" (Chess)*
- *"Informal- but structured in a gentle way" (Floristry)*
- *"The friendly nature of us all and the way we help each other" (Craft group)*
- *"Informal, friendly, allowed to go at your own pace without being confrontational" (Beginners French)*
- *"Friendly, casual and enlightening" (Philosophical Issues)*
- *"Friendly and casual atmosphere" (The Weiss Report)*
- *"Relaxed course. No need to study or read material" (Economics)*

Egalitarian & inclusive nature

- *"All members of the group felt free to make contributions to the discussion" (Economics)*
- *"The fact that the tutor makes sure that each person has the opportunity to participate" (Book discussion)*
- *"The way people participate and encouraged to think" (History of the World)"*
- *"Every student had an opportunity to contribute and have problems resolved" (French Re-connection)*
- *"It enabled everyone to participate and read their stories" (Monday Writers)*

Good organisation, structure and variety

- *"The division of participants according to their experience is good, reducing the problem of mismatched players" (Chess)*
- *"Good leader- can restore order but only does if necessary. We have a lot of fun" (Cryptic Crosswords)*
- *"The lessons have been structured carefully" (Japanese Basic)*
- *"Tutor always makes sure to vary the discussions, and at times music, readings etc. (German Language group)*
- *"Informal, with videos, information from the tutor, and plenty of time for questions and comment" (History of the World)*
- *"Well disciplined- there is no waffle" (The Weiss Report)*
- *"Interesting topics that appeal to a large group and unpredictable re what we do next, so don't like to miss any classes" (Wisdom of the Ages)*
- *"Stimulation of interest and presentation of relevant materials, and the musical performances" (Choir)*

Tutors professionalism, knowledge and enthusiasm

- *"The tutors enthusiasm for the subject and his willingness to allow class participation" (History of the World)*
- *"The tutor keeps us on our toes. The class is varied and moves fast" (French L6)*
- *"The tutor's preparation for her class was spot on and must have been time consuming. Great content, interesting and challenging material." (French Conversation)*

- *“The tutor’s thorough professionalism and her firm yet friendly style of conducting the choir” (Choir)*
- *“Good teaching skills, and plenty of opportunity to practice” (Chess)*
- *“Every posture is demonstrated or clearly explained, with variations for the less able” (Yoga)*

Tutors patience and support

- *“The tutor is tolerant and understanding- she caters for each person’s needs” (Japanese Basic)*
- *“The teacher’s encouragement and stimulation is very good” (English conversation)*
- *“The open encouraging way of demonstrating and sharing skills by the tutor and others in the class” (Botanical Drawing)*
- *“She is a very good leader and brings out everyone, including those who are less articulate” (Shakespeare)*

Shared responsibility

- *“All share in the responsibility for conducting the class” (Advanced Italian)*
- *“Egalitarian approach- taking turns chairing (Wednesday Writers)*
- *“The interest fellow members show- the feedback and ideas that may change the flow of the individual session” (Wednesday Writers)*

Frequency & Number of classes

Satisfaction with weekly yearlong classes

- *“I like the continuity throughout the year” (Wisdom of the Ages)*
- *The course needs to be a yearlong. It is good to have the term holidays, just for a break (French Re-connection)*
- *“Could not manage more than once a week” (Beginners French)”*

Desire for weekly classes

- *“Good, but would prefer weekly” (Cryptic Crosswords)*

Changes to content

Thoroughness & evolving nature of content

- *“I found it very enlightening and wouldn’t suggest any changes having been informed of what will be covered over the year” (Economics)*
- *“We already have input on what we like to learn about’ (Wisdom of the Ages)*

Satisfaction with status quo

- *“Excellent as is “(Cryptic Crosswords)*
- *“No changes are required, the current course suits my needs” (Wednesday Writers)*
- *“Happy as it is- tutor is great” (Floristry)*
- *“Very satisfied with content” (German Language group)*

Overall comments

Diversity & affordability of program

- *“Very comprehensive and good variety- a great way to meet like-minded people (Mah-jong Tuesday)*
- *“An excellent opportunity to learn new things that one hasn’t had time for in the past, and at an extremely affordable price” (Economics)*

Tutor appreciation

- *“An excellent range of subjects offered by very able tutors. My sincere thanks to tutors who share their time so regularly and so generously” (German Language & Culture)*

Benefit to seniors wellbeing

- *“U3A courses are very informative and a great way to keep active brain-wise and physically, great variety, and friendly people (Philosophical Issues)*