

2012 Short Course Student Feedback- Executive Summary



Introduction

During 2012 sixty short courses were run covering a diverse range of topics, over half (33) being new courses, offered in many instances by tutors new to our program. The focus for written feedback was on the new short courses, and to a lesser extent those revised or repeated for the first time. Feedback was provided on 30 courses, 23 of which were new courses and as such covers 70% of new courses.

204 students gave written feedback- being 57% of the 358 students enrolled in the 30 participating short courses. Given the inevitable drop-outs, the number of returns represent 78% of the average course attendance overall and a higher 94% of last day attendance. This provides a relatively sound basis for interpretation and conclusions.

Findings

Course Delivery. Based on key findings from prior analyses, students were asked to rate and comment on their enjoyment of the course and various aspects of how it was run. With the exception of course length, all aspects received very high ratings.

- Students strongly agreed that the course was **enjoyable** (93%), commenting that the tutor's insights and passion, as well as the group discussion, contributed greatly to their enjoyment.
- A similar percent found the course **stimulating** (93%), with the range of materials and questions posed challenging them to engage more with the topic.
- However only 66% strongly agreed that the course was **the right length**, with some students commenting it needed to be longer given the amount of material to cover, skills to be learned and their enjoyment of the course.

In terms of how the course was run, feedback affirmed the inclusiveness and professionalism of the tutors approach.

- 92% strongly agreed that the course had **a friendly and supportive atmosphere**, commenting on the tutor's support and encouragement to members and the rapport developed between students.
- Correspondingly 93% stated that **student participation & interaction was encouraged** by the tutor in regards questions and discussion, and in leading class activities.
- 87% students strongly agreed that **sessions were well organised**, with **high quality content** (88%), and **clear and interesting presentation** (91%).
- Students valued the tutor's attention to information and activities that would engage and extend them, with 87% strongly agreeing that **useful learning resources and activities** were provided. The range of class activities/homework; handouts, audio-visual and other class resources, and links for further study were positively noted.

Suggested Changes. Asked to suggest changes to **the content or delivery of the course**, only half responded. Of these many students indicated that no change was required, commenting on the excellence of the course as is.

Where change was suggested, the majority of responses related to course or session length, with many members wanting a longer or more in depth course.

In other instances suggestions related to different class activities, student preparation and provision of class summary notes/resources, and the need for clearer prerequisites.

Course outcomes and benefits. Students were asked to comment on *what they got out of attending the course*, sixty-two percent did so with a majority of responses relating to the knowledge and understanding gained of the subject area or the skills acquired.

- ❖ *“A huge insight into how to interpret Medieval language and literature”*
- ❖ *“Certainly an increase in knowledge & history, spiced with little anecdotes to whet the appetite”*
- ❖ *“This short course has given me the knowledge to put together a short program of exercises that I can do each day (hopefully!)”*

Some noted their inspiration and motivation to explore the topic/practice further; others their enhanced health and wellbeing, and the social benefits of the course.

- ❖ *“Have been inspired to read more widely and read other plays of the same playwright”*
- ❖ *“Motivation to vary my diet and confidence to shop for that variety”*
- ❖ *“A great improvement/relief from chronic lumber back pain”*
- ❖ *“Confidence in speaking in other classes”*
- ❖ *“Company of interesting people and stimulating discussions”*

General comments. In commenting on the *course overall or our program generally*, many students praised the excellence of the tutor, the desire for follow-up courses and the importance of courses of that nature, especially in health and science areas.

Several members commented specifically on new topics they would like to see added to the program, including photography and corporate governance.

Others noted the value of short courses and the excellence of the program overall. Some expressed appreciation at being able to access this wonderful resource.

- ❖ *“A wonderful chance to discover satisfying pursuits- short courses in particular are great tastings”*
- ❖ *“I’m a new member. This has been my first involvement and I am absolutely thrilled with what I have experienced”*
- ❖ *“The course program of U3A Melbourne City is awesome. I consider U3A to be one of the most life-enhancing offerings available to the lucky senior citizens”*

Conclusions: The relatively high participation rate by tutors and students, and overwhelmingly positive responses from members indicates the short course program is well run, meeting members needs and highly valued. The key findings are consistent with the 2011 findings, reflecting a continued high educational standard in line with practices that support adult learning.

The new question on members perceived personal outcomes shows they gained not only knowledge and skills but were also motivated and inspired to continue with an area of study. Other outcomes noted include health benefits, confidence building and companionship with other class members, all important aspects of our U3As contribution to active positive ageing.

Without the commitment, knowledge and passion of the volunteer tutors these benefits would not be possible and that acknowledgement is also evident in students’ responses. There is strong support for the growth and diversity of the short courses program, and useful suggestions on topic areas that can be expanded or introduced in the future.

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