

Student Feedback - "Remaining" Yearlong Courses Executive Summary October 2017

"Because it is such a pleasant venue and everyone in the class contributes to the discussion in a respectful manner, I look forward to Tuesday mornings. The class is guaranteed to bring up something unexpected and we usually manage to learn something new as well as have a good laugh"

Introduction

During 2016 written feedback was reintroduced for yearlong courses, commencing with the Humanities and Language programs. In June 2017 the remaining Yearlong courses were surveyed. Students in 26 courses covering the social sciences, arts (practical and appreciation), yoga and lifestyle topics were electronically surveyed. Some 328 members provided feedback, representing 60% of all enrolled students with email. As in the earlier 2016 yearlong surveys, feedback was very positive about the leader/tutors professionalism in running of their course, the enjoyment and benefits students derived.

Key Findings

Student Expectations and Outcomes from attending the course

Multiple factors prompted students to enrol in the particular course. Respondents indicated that they enrolled predominantly because they had a general interest in topics such as current affairs, creative arts, brain games or health practices (72%) and wanted to deepen their skills and knowledge in that subject area (57%), as well as expecting to meet people with similar interests (35%). In this respect, students surveyed more closely resembled the Humanities students enrolment motivation than the Language students surveyed last year.

"I am interested in history and the idea of a walking activity appealed as a way of exploring the history of parts of Melbourne"

"Had played a lot of chess previously but never learned it in a structured fashion. This was an opportunity to deepen my understanding of the game"

Importantly, with few exceptions the course very well met or exceeded their expectations (89%). Students reported significant educational and social benefits from their participation in the course.

The greater majority (75%) nominated the knowledge gained in the subject area as an important outcome, with 57% also specifying the skills acquired- be they creative, analytical or health practices.

"I gained a great deal of knowledge about the media industry and humanity in general from the discussions we had on a huge range of topics covered"

"I have found new skills in mediation and am inspired to persevere with these skills"

Additionally over a half (56%) identified the companionship derived from course participation as a specific benefit both within and beyond the classroom, while 38% reported improved health and wellbeing, and 39% were motivated and inspired by the tutor/leader and other students in their group.

"I especially enjoy the friendly atmosphere of the class and the companionship of people who share my interests"

"I feel much less stiff after the yoga lesson. I walk out calm and relaxed and more supple"

"I'm inspired and learn a lot from the other participants in the course"

Course Delivery

These core benefits to students clearly stemmed from their dynamic engagement in the course activity, and quality of the program delivered by individual tutors and group leaders. In particular students loved the stimulation, diversity and challenge of the various courses' core activity, their tutors enthusiasm, knowledge and teaching style, in conjunction with the positive interaction and knowledge sharing between class members throughout the year.

"Opportunity to play my clarinet at the right level of difficulty with a good tutor"

"Interesting variety of movies and genres"

"I think tutor really knows her stuff, and explains everything clearly. She is also very enthusiastic about her area of expertise, which comes across"

"There is a wealth of combined knowledge in the class, and it is offered freely and with expertise. No matter what the question, there is always someone with an answer"

In rating specific aspects of course delivery, students strongly endorsed the tutor/leader's knowledge and enthusiasm (91%), their providing a supportive and friendly atmosphere for learning (84%), and encouraging student participation (77%). Respondents strongly agreed that sessions were well-organised (81%), with relevant course content (84%), of the right length (81%) and in a suitable venue (78%). Relatively few suggestions were made regarding changes to the course content or delivery.

"I like that the tutor has the ability to draw out people's reasons for thinking the way they do, and including as many people as possible in the discussion"

"Well organised each week and friendly people. There is an environment of trust where it is OK to have a go and not always be correct"

Our U3A Course Program Overall

Many students noted the excellent quality and diversity of courses offered by U3A Melbourne City and the professionalism of the organisation overall.

"There is an excellent variety on offer and it is extremely well run, thanks to the hard work of all the volunteers"

"I have enjoyed all the courses I have done, plus the outside activities. It is a wonderful resource for we retirees"

A number of students noted the problems associated with recent and future organisation growth, some offering suggestions regarding future enrolment procedures.

"I am only sorry that I have been unable to enrol in more courses, mainly due to the number of courses one can join and the class number restrictions. U3A Melbourne is a victim of its own success"

"I would like to see a limit on the number of times a person can enrol in a course to give new people a chance in the most popular courses. Also, putting in apologies for several months at a stretch should not be permitted. Many people who are able to commit to attending a course are missing out as a result".

Looking to the future, various suggestions were also made about new courses in Lifestyle/Health practices and the Arts categories, thereby providing guidance to tutors and the Course Coordination Team in further development of the program.

"I think that a Scrabble Club also challenges and makes you think. Perhaps that could be considered for next year"

"More courses on technology- use of mobile phones, Facebook, Instagram etc "

"Art History, particularly Australian, indigenous and art movements"

Conclusions

On this basis, we can conclude that these 2017 yearlong courses provided great enjoyment for participants, were well run along lines that support learning for mature age students, and also fostered companionship and improved health. Students voiced their appreciation of the leader/tutors expertise and approach to teaching which achieve the educational, social and wellbeing goals of the U3A program.

"For me, U3A classes should at least allow the possibility of learning something new, and I'm definitely still enjoying learning about the game in this class. U3A classes should also encourage companionship- and this class does"

***Julie Nankervis
Course Coordination Team***