

11-18-2015

Case studies to enhance online student evaluation: University of Western Australia – A journey towards greater engagement through closing-the- loop

Sid Nair

University of Western Australia

Vishen Naidu

Bond University, Vishen_Naidu@bond.edu.au

Madelaine Judd

Bond University, madelaine_001@hotmail.com

Shelley Kinash

Bond University, shelley.kinash@gmail.com

Julie Fleming

Central Queensland University

Follow us for additional works at: <http://epublications.bond.edu.au/tls>



Part of the [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#), and the [Higher Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Nair, Sid; Naidu, Vishen; Judd, Madelaine; Kinash, Shelley; Fleming, Julie; Santhanam, Elizabeth; Tucker, Beatrice; and Tulloch, Marian, "Case studies to enhance online student evaluation: University of Western Australia – A journey towards greater engagement through closing-the-loop" (2015). *Learning and Teaching papers*. Paper 118.
<http://epublications.bond.edu.au/tls/118>

This Research Report is brought to you by the Learning and Teaching at ePublications@bond. It has been accepted for inclusion in Learning and Teaching papers by an authorized administrator of ePublications@bond. For more information, please contact [Bond University's Repository Coordinator](#).

Authors

Sid Nair, Vishen Naidu, Madelaine Judd, Shelley Kinash, Julie Fleming, Elizabeth Santhanam, Beatrice Tucker, and Marian Tulloch



Case studies to enhance student evaluation

2015 University of Western Australia:
A journey towards greater engagement through closing-the-loop.



THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
Achieve International Excellence



BOND UNIVERSITY
BRINGING AMBITION TO LIFE



Support for the production of this report has been provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.



With the exception of the Commonwealth Coat of Arms, and where otherwise noted, all material presented in this document is provided under Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>.

The details of the relevant licence conditions are available on the Creative Commons website (accessible using the links provided) as is the full legal code for the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcode>.

Requests and inquiries concerning these rights should be addressed to:
Office for Learning and Teaching
Department of Education and Training

GPO Box 9880,
Location code N255EL10
Sydney NSW 2001

<learningandteaching@education.gov.au>

2015

ISBN	PDF	978-1-76028-253-0
ISBN	PRINT	978-1-76028-254-7

Cite as: Nair, S., Naidu, V., Judd, M-M., Kinash, S., Fleming, J., Santhanam, E., Tucker, B., & Tulloch, M. (2015). Case studies to enhance online student evaluation: University of Western Australia – A journey towards greater engagement through closing-the-loop. Sydney, Australia: Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. <http://highereducationstudentevaluation.com/>

Contents

04 Acknowledgements

05 Abstract

05 Introduction

06 Closing the loop

07 Strategies

08 Conclusion

08 References

Acknowledgements

The project team would like to acknowledge and thank the Office for Learning and Teaching, Australian Government, for funding this research project and particularly Victoria Ross, Ellen Poels and Yamini Naidu who provided exemplar support as well as Rachel Bard for being our Bond go-to person on all matters regarding OLT projects. We acknowledge a strong team including: Leader, Associate Professor Shelley Kinash (Bond University); an exemplar Project Manager (PM), Madelaine-Marie Judd; Evaluator, Professor Sally Kift (James Cook University); Reference Group Members, Professor Bruce Ravelli, Canada and Professor Satu Kalliola, Finland; Bond University Team Member, Vishen Naidu; Associate Professor Elizabeth Santhanam (Australian Catholic University), Dr Julie Fleming (Central Queensland University); Professor Marian Tulloch (Charles Sturt University); Ms Beatrice Tucker (Curtin University); and Professor Chenicheri Sid Nair (The University of Western Australia).

We express sincere gratitude to the interview & focus group participants; we value your recommendations on how to enhance student evaluation and your ongoing commitment. We would also like to thank: Professor Keitha Dunstan for leadership, particularly in supporting our team to ensure that the derived good practices were applied to strengthen the impact on a quality student learning experience at Bond University, as the lead institution.

Our project was only possible through the support of: Andrew Calder, Elizabeth Gordon and Lynda Burke from the Bond Office of Research Services; Vishen Naidu for graphic design; Lauren Skelsey, Bond Marketing and Recruitment for providing photo stock; Daniel Hollands and Dane Marley for web development; Rachel Bard for symposium coordination and exemplar administrative support throughout the project; the Bond Events team for hosting the Symposium; dedicated student volunteers including, Jessamine (Fatos) Yilmaz, Hayley Bowman, Rose Burke, Novebry Chindy Wilbowo and staff Susie Hifo; Ron Kordyban, Christian King and Daniel Hollands for filming, editing and posting videos online; Aunty Joyce and Professor Keitha Dunstan for welcoming guests; Symposium Keynote speakers: Professor Sid Nair and Ms Beatrice Tucker; Symposium panellists and chairs including Shelley Kinash, Madelaine-Marie Judd, Ms Christina Ballantyne, Associate Professor Mahsood Shah, Mr Nigel Palmer, Mr Dylan Ettridge, Ms Tessa Daly, and Mr Ben Hartsuyker.

Abstract

Feedback from students has shown time and again to be useful indicators of what is happening in the teaching and learning environments. Such feedback from students, pivot around the actions that are taken. This implementation of actions expresses to students that their voice is being heard in higher education institutions. To achieve such utility of feedback provided by student, it is essential to 'close the loop' and constitutes; the collection of qualitative and quantitative feedback from all cohorts of students; triangulating the data from various sources to identify areas of good practice and areas needing improvement; communicating the results and actions of the feedback with students and staff; implementing improvements in consultation with stakeholders; and monitoring the impact of actions in future student survey results. Such a framework would constitute effective quality assurances of the student feedback systems in higher education institutions.

Introduction

The research literature articulates well the pivotal role students play in university management by providing feedback on what they see as most important and their satisfaction to the teaching and learning environments (eg., Bennett & Nair, 2010; Harvey et.al. 1997). Clearly supporting the literature is the reality where the student experience in general is on the radar of institutions in terms of making the teaching and learning experience the best it can be for their students. Supporting this is the research which demonstrates that student perceptions are not only reliable but as well valid indicators of the quality of the courses and programs. In addition, there is clear evidence that feedback from students' evaluations can lead to improved teaching effectiveness thus enhancing the quality of the educational environment. The research literature illustrates the value add of student feedback as follows (Bennett & Nair, 2010; Shah & Nair, 2012):

- **Diagnostic feedback to departments, schools and faculties about the teaching and learning taking place which in turn aids in the development and improvement of teaching;**
- **Critical research data that aid in the further design and improvements to the curriculum and teaching activities;**
- **A measure of effectiveness of the learning and teaching environments; and**
- **A source of useful information for current and potential students in the selection of units and courses and possibly the institution.**



Closing the loop

The term 'closing the loop' is often used within the corridors of higher education to encompass the actions relating to reporting back to students the changes that are being considered or has taken place as a result of them providing feedback via surveys or other forums. Simply put acknowledging that participants have a right to know what is being done as a result of their feedback.

Supporting this notion of closing the loop is the work of Harvey et al (1997). In this work the researchers suggest that "feedback is not only a courtesy to those who have taken time to respond but it is also essential to demonstrate that the process both identifies areas of student concern and does something about them". To be effective Harvey (2011) suggests a number of steps. These include;

- **Institutions identifying and delegating responsibility for actions;**
- **Encouraging the ownership of the action plans;**
- **Ensuring accountability is inbuilt for the actions to be taken;**
- **A communication process where the outcomes of the feedback are reported back to students and**
- **The commitment of appropriate resources so that the changes can be actioned.**

In addition to the elements outlined by Harvey (2011), two other critical factors play an important part for an effective implementation of the closing of the loop phase; monitoring of the actions taken, and resourcing the effective implementation of the agreed actions/improvements.

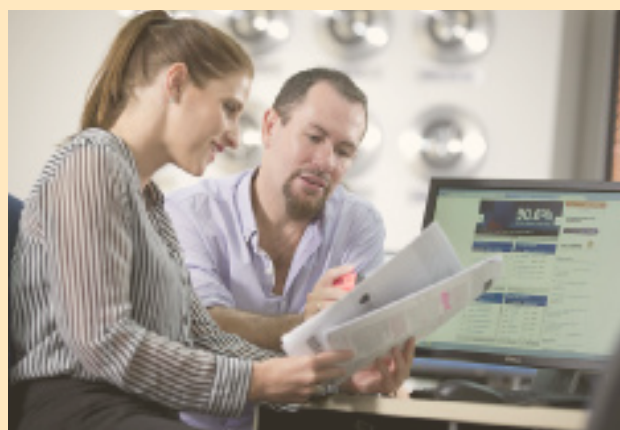
An argument that been voiced by many academics is that there are too many surveys in the system and 'survey fatigue' is the root cause for low responses. Though this seems like a sound argument, the research literature suggests that the primary reason for the reluctance of participants to provide feedback is that there is little evidence that action has been taken in response to their feedback (e.g. Harvey, 2003; Nair, Adams, & Mertova, 2008; Powney and Hall 1998; Leckey and Neill 2001). Leckey and Neill's (2001) work supports this notion that actions taken are integral to "closing the loop" otherwise students tend to be sceptical and unwilling to participate.

In addition, Harvey (2003) argues that not only must there be action taken based on student views but there is a need for the students to be convinced that change has occurred.

Bennett and Nair (2010) go further by suggesting that for the loop to be effective students need to be informed about the purpose and the subsequent use of evaluations in the quality cycle.

Supporting the notion that 'closing the loop' is integral to an effective quality system is illustrated by a number of researchers demonstrating the positive effect of when feedback loops are covered (Watson, 2003; Symons, 2006). Watson (2006) for instance shows how longitudinal satisfaction trends have improved when a transparent approach is adopted by an institution. The work of Powney and Hall (1998) strongly suggests that institutions where staff are not concerned about student opinion, student apathy towards the completion of feedback surveys is more apparent. They go on to argue that as a result of such complacency students are less likely to take the time and effort to complete questionnaires if they feel that it is simply a meaningless and a ritual that the institution goes through to tick the appropriate boxes in their quality process.

In general there is agreement in the research literature that closing of the loop phase has been the neglected component of the feedback loop and is the most challenging step in the evaluation cycle (Harvey 2011; Powney & Hall, 1998; Watson, 2003). University audits have also have highlighted this issue of the lack of follow through by universities in failing to act on the data they have collected (Nair & Shah, 2011).



Strategies

The need to 'close the loop' has been identified by a number of researchers resulting in institutions initiating changes to address this matter (Kek, Hunt, & Sankey, 2009). Organisations in general would have to communicate the outcomes of surveys or feedback back to their stakeholders. Table one outlines some strategies that could be utilised to get back to stakeholders.

Table one: Strategies to 'close the loop'

Strategy	Advantage	Disadvantage	
In class communication	Verbal report to class by teacher	Effective at the unit/subject level No cost and easy to do	Uses class time
	Written report to class by teacher		Teacher time to summarise response
	Verbal report to class by a student representative		Uses class time All students may not be present Student representative may not be able to answer queries
	Include in unit/subject outlines	Easy and quick Students can easily refer to the information	Benefits only incoming students
Electronic Communication	General email to all students and staff	Easy and quick Inexpensive and efficient	Might not reach students who have graduated
	Uploading on the Learning Management System		Effective if LMS is frequently used in class Will not reach students who have completed the unit or graduated
	World Wide Web including applicable Facebook and Twitter sites	Can be developed to varying degrees of sophistication Easy accessibility to current students Useful for multi-site delivery situation	May involve web development costs May need to password protect access
	Online handbooks for perspective students	Easily available for future students	Some areas may not have information ready
	What's New section on university home page or portal	Easily accessible Accessible to the total student population	
	Texting students on their mobile/cell phones with links	Fast, efficient and low cost	Privacy issues Cost issues for student to access site sites to review outcome
Radio Broadcast	Advertise outcome on student run radio station on campus	Reaches many students Possibly no expense	
Posters/Flyers/ Newsletters	Advertise around department or mail or email directly to students	Effective at the course level	Will involve production and design cost Time consuming and delay in getting fast response to participants

Conclusion

It has been argued by a number of researchers that the need to 'close the loop' is imperative to student evaluation (Kek, Hunt, & Sankey, 2009). A number of strategies were highlighted ranging from in-class verbal reports from educators to advertising the results of student evaluation through flyers and newsletters. Such strategies as these, signify to students that their feedback is valued and used as a mean to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

References

- Bennett, L., & Nair, C.S. (2010). A recipe for effective participation rates for web base surveys. *Assessment and Evaluation Journal*, 35(4), 357-366.
- Harvey, L. (2011). The nexus of feedback and improvement. In Nair & Mertova (Eds.), *Student Feedback the corner stone to an effective quality assurance system in higher education* (pp. 3-28). Oxford, UK: Woodhead Publishing.
- Harvey, L., Mon, S., & Plimmer, L. (1997). *The Student Satisfaction Manual*. Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.
- Kek, M., Hunt, L., & Sankey, M. (2009, July). *Closing the Loop: A Case Study of a Post-evaluation Strategy*. Proceedings of the Australian Universities Quality Forum, Alice Springs. (pp. 100-105). Retrieved from https://eprints.usq.edu.au/5408/2/Kek_Hunt_Sankey_2009_PV.pdf
- Leckey, J., & N. Neill. (2001). Quantifying quality: The importance of student feedback. *Quality in Higher Education*, 7(1), 19–32.
- Nair, C.S., Adams, P. & Mertova, P. (2008). Student engagement: The key to improving survey response rates. *Quality in Higher Education*, 14(3), 225-232.
- Nair, C. S. & Shah, M. (2011). Developing an effective student feedback and evaluation system. Proceedings of the Australian Universities Quality Forum, Demonstra Quality, Melbourne.
- Powney, J., & Hall, J. (1998). *Closing the loop: The impact of student feedback on students; subsequent learning*. Edinburgh: Scottish Council for Research in Education.
- Shah, M., & Nair, C. S. (2012). The changing nature of teaching and unit evaluations in Australian Universities. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 20(3), 274 – 288.
- Symons, R. (2006, November). *Listening to the student voice at the University of Sydney: Closing the loop in the quality enhancement and improvement cycle*. Paper presented at the 2006 Australian Association for Institutional Research (AAIR) Forum, Coffs Harbour, NSW.
- Watson, S. (2003) Closing the feedback loop: Ensuring effective action from student feedback. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 9(2), 145-157.