



To Review the Module Evaluation Process and Manage Students' Expectations

Claire Mills
University of Gloucestershire

Activity

To review the module evaluation process and manage students' expectations.

Group

40 Level Two students over one semester.

Aim

The aim of this activity was to establish a method of recording whether students' learning experiences throughout a module were meeting students' expectations.

Context / Background

The Faculty employs a generic end-of-module evaluation form that allows students to respond to key questions / themes and to make comments on strengths, weaknesses and possible recommendations as to how changes might be made to the module. The key questions/themes were:

- The module guide was informative and provided guidance for assessment.
- The module has allowed me to achieve the stated module outcomes.
- The lectures were informative.

- The module was well-organised.
- The lecturing staff were approachable and helpful.
- The lecturing staff gave quality guidance and support for the assessment.
- The learning resources, environment and facilities were appropriate.
- Access to learning resources has been adequate for this module.
- Assessment arrangements including marking criteria have been clear.
- I found the material/concepts required for the assignment useful to me.
- Overall the learning experience has been a positive one.

This form is generally administered during the latter part of the module (normally weeks 11-12), thereby presenting three potential problems. First is the reliance on students' remembering what was delivered in weeks 1-10. Secondly, consideration needs to be given to whether the students are engaged fully in the laborious (and possibly monotonous) module evaluation process. Thirdly, staff must consider if a student's knowledge of any mid-semester coursework grade has had an effect on the overall perception of the module. It is important to acknowledge that some academics provide an opportunity for informal mid-semester evaluation discussions, suggesting that there is a demand for 'taking stock of the situation'. However, one may question whether students feel comfortable speaking about the weaknesses of a module when facing the module tutor.

In providing further context to this case study it is important to note other factors that may influence the evaluation process. At a Faculty level, within the area of Sports Education, the team adopts, for the majority of practical modules, a system in which marks are deducted from the overall module grade for non-attendance. There are many reasons for this system and the idea is not one for discussion here, but it could be argued that even when a student has opted for a module, in essence, attendance is compulsory. As a consequence of this, students can be asked to give full and reflective evaluations on their experience throughout the module.

On a more general note, it is important for teaching teams to consider what the students themselves are getting out of the evaluation process. Module tutors make every effort to stress the importance of completing evaluations, emphasising that comments are written into end of module reports, presented at relevant Course Boards and are the basis on which changes to delivery are founded. However, it can be the case that when module evaluations are handed out, a series of 'moans and groans' can be heard, suggesting students might be disengaged from this process. Equally, if we are requesting comments on a module that is nearing completion, are their voices actually being heard or indeed being acted upon?

It is also common practice for academics to administer evaluation forms before returning students' work or grades. This can lead to claims that students who feel aggrieved with their grade might provide a critical appraisal of the module in their evaluation, regardless of their actual experience.

Finally, within the current financial climate, we continue to hear demands for 'value for money'. Thus, teaching teams should offer students opportunities for discussion, and be willing to facilitate change and appropriate adaptation where needed.

In an attempt to address these problems it was decided to ask 40 Sports Education undergraduate degree students who were registered on an aquatic activities module to complete an evaluation during Weeks 2, 6 and 12. On the first evaluation, all students were asked to write their university number on the proforma. This meant students remained anonymous but could retrieve their evaluation with relative ease in Weeks 6 and 12. They were also instructed to complete the evaluation using a symbol that differentiated each of the three weeks. During Week 2 the students became familiar with the evaluation questions / themes and set out their expectations of the module. This process was repeated in Weeks 6 and 12, which enabled the module tutor to determine through the measuring scale (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree) whether students' expectations had declined, stayed the same or improved.

Example

As a result of this study, the modified module evaluation process will continue to be employed, although additions to the evaluation process will be made to identify further areas for questioning. It is important that any evaluation form used is formatted to provide the module tutor with an easy system to extract responses. The evaluation should also include questions/themes relating to module content, delivery and academic expertise. The module tutor should be able to monitor and manage expectations in a more efficient manner and have a sense of the successes and difficulties within the module from an early stage.

Results/Feedback

The module evaluation process proved to be successful and students suggested that the process itself was a positive experience. Although it was time-consuming in the first instance, students soon became familiar with the key questions and themes. The main benefit of the approach for the module tutors was that they were able to monitor the effectiveness of the module organisation and administration on an on-going basis. Students also commented that they were aware that their voice was being heard and that the module tutor cared about their opinion.

There is of course a danger of evaluation overload, but introducing a middle of the semester evaluation process, may have benefits and in the longer term be more effective, allowing an opportunity for adaptation within the module if needed. If undertaking such a process it is important that the timing of the administration process does not interfere with/coincide with the communicating of module grades.

Clearly, as academics we are in a good position to plan, implement and facilitate a module. With an ability to reflect on aspects of the module delivery from cohort to cohort, staff have a different perspective to that of each cohort

of undergraduate students who sit the module just once. This experience might lead staff to feel that immediate changes or changes 'on demand' are not appropriate but is it important that when changes can be justified action is taken. On-going student feedback can form the evidence-base for these actions.