

Quick facts about the course survey

Purpose

- The VP of Education and Student Services has mandated the systematic, college-wide collection of feedback because student input is vital for the betterment of the educational environment of the college. It's crucial for the instructor and college to receive this feedback, for only students know specifically what is working well for them and what isn't.
- Administrators use this feedback from students to inform decisions about future course offerings. Faculty members reflect seriously on student feedback about what is and is not effective in the courses they teach and consider student suggestions for possible ways to improve the course.
- Constructive feedback is vital—as is positive (and even neutral) feedback: if satisfied students don't provide input, feedback received by administrators could present a disproportionately negative picture and affect the program in ways students might not find beneficial. It's also important and affirming for instructors to hear positive feedback about whichever aspects of the course are working well.

History

- The college-wide course feedback survey was established in this format 5 years ago by a formal, interdisciplinary committee.
- The survey process and questions to be included were developed after extensive consultation with representatives of the faculty unions.

Scope

- The course survey includes courses that are worth 2 or more credits and involve class time in lecture, seminar, or labs and are taught at Interurban or Lansdowne campus in Q1, Q2, Fall or Winter terms.
- The course survey includes only course sections that are taught by one or more instructors who have a continuing contract (and are past probation). This prevents over-surveying students who provide feedback to their departments about term and probationary instructors for faculty review.
- The course survey gathers student feedback about effectiveness of course materials, support services, college facilities, course content, pacing, course materials, the structure of assignments, and general pedagogy. Questions are focussed on the student's experience of the course itself, rather than on their assessment of the job performance of the instructor
- Survey questions are published on the website, and students are welcome to read the questions in advance, so they're prepared to provide thoughtful responses on the day of the survey.

Rotation and frequency

- All in-scope courses are included once in every two-year cycle (regardless of who is teaching or how many sections are offered). Approx 25% of all eligible courses are included each term. The course survey's rotation is based on how recently a given course was included in the course survey (rather than how recently a specific instructor's courses were surveyed).
- Instructors who teach full course loads will often have several courses surveyed each term or have every course they teach surveyed during half of the terms in the two-year period (and no surveys in the other half of the terms). Whether courses are taught every term, once per year, or every other year, each course is included once per two-year cycle.
- Some instructors teach a larger variety of courses than other instructors, so it may seem that some instructors have more courses included or are included more frequently than others. However, the rotation is always the same: every course is included once during each two-year cycle. (Names of instructors are not a factor when determining in which term a course will be included in the survey.)

Course survey scheduling

- Course surveys are scheduled and posted on the website at the start of the survey term in order to allow instructors an opportunity to identify scheduling conflicts and, if necessary, suggest alternate survey times or dates.
- We gladly work with instructors to find solutions to any scheduling concerns and try to make the survey experience as positive as possible for faculty and students. In some special circumstances (such as extensive instructor absence) surveys can be deferred until a later term.
- Instructors receive a reminder approximately one week before their first survey, at which time they are again invited to request any necessary adaptations to the survey schedule.

Process

- At appointed times, a survey assistant arrives at the class room door, briefly explains the survey, and accompanies students to the survey site (this term the LLC Multipurpose Room or CBA 250), where students provide feedback about their courses using a brief online survey. Students unable to participate at the appointed time may go the survey site later to provide feedback at their convenience (depending on computer availability).
- To reduce use of class time, two or three courses that share a cohort are sometimes scheduled as a "block" of surveys during one course's class time.
- Because survey attendants have, at most, a brief chance to explain the survey, we rely on instructors to prepare students in advance by explaining the survey's purpose and emphasizing the importance of their feedback.

Student participation

- On average, more than 80% of students choose to participate, and many instructors consistently obtain 100% participation in their course surveys. Student participation is expected as a routine matter because class time has been designated for this purpose, college-wide.
- Since the college gathers feedback about each course only once every two years, each student's brief effort will count as two full years of student input.
- Students are also asked to provide anonymous written feedback about the course survey. The vast majority of students indicate that they appreciate the process we use and the opportunity to provide anonymous feedback to administrators and instructors.
- Students often suggest more frequent course surveys or request permission to provide feedback about additional courses.

Reporting

- Instructors receive section-specific reports to inform their professional development and self-improvement efforts.
- Senior administrators receive compiled results (not specific to individual faculty members) in order to inform educational programming decisions at Camosun College.
- Students are able to access general results posted on the website.

Confidentiality

- Feedback is completely anonymous and also withheld until end-of-term grades have been submitted.
- Feedback is not provided to the instructor unless there are sufficient responses to assure anonymity.
- Several efforts are made to respect instructor privacy:
 - For courses with more than one instructor, students often provide separate feedback about the different aspects of the course. In those cases, results are given only to the instructor of the portion of the course that the feedback relates to.
 - Instructors are the only people who receive feedback reports about specific course sections.
 - The deans receive reports with feedback that has been edited and compiled with feedback from other courses. As a result, they receive a general picture of how things are going in their divisions and departments that term.
- Term reports published on the website present only college-wide summary results.

Regarding best practice and feedback collection

- The course feedback survey is an institutional response to ensure a minimum level of quality assurance across the College, and funding requires postsecondary institutions to have a process like this in place.
- Feedback is consistently collected across the college, enabling a broad range of analysis and reporting.
- The feedback gathered by the college-wide course survey is well used: each term, it provides instructors with course section reports and Deans with summary reports, often at the department level.
- Every two years, results from one survey cycle are compared with results from other cycles, so trends over time (at course, department, and school levels) can be tracked. The first report comparing two cycles is now available on the website.
- A new feature is that instructors may now request reports comparing feedback about their own course sections across courses and/or over time.
- Many institutions formally gather student feedback about every course section each term. Camosun gathers feedback about each course only once every two years. Faculty members and departments are encouraged to gather additional feedback as they see fit, but if students are in danger of being asked to provide feedback too often, the college-wide survey is the priority.
- Faculty members are encouraged to inform students in advance of course survey dates and are invited to steer student thoughts toward particular topics for the final course-related question: “Please add any further comments about your experience in this course”.
- While student participation in the course survey is voluntary, we encourage students to take this opportunity to express their thoughts about the course and learning environment at Camosun College.
- Students and faculty members have provided extensive feedback about Camosun’s course feedback survey and have offered several suggestions which we were able to incorporate as we continued to refine our process. Currently, the possibility of an online alternative is being considered for the future.
- The course survey’s questions, FAQ’s, reports for two recent terms, and a comprehensive 2-year report are available (along with the course survey schedule) on our website at <http://camosun.ca/about/educational-research/feedback/index.html>.

Please feel free to contact me anytime. I’d be happy to address any questions or concerns you might have and would welcome your feedback or suggestions concerning the course survey.

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