

Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice

Volume 6, Issue 1

2009

Article 3

First year student expectations: Results from a university-wide student survey

Geoffrey Crisp*

Edward Palmer†

Deborah Turnbull‡

Ted Nettelbeck**

Lynn Ward††

Amanda LeCouteur‡‡

Aspa Sarris§

Peter Strelan¶

Luke Schneider||

*University of Adelaide, geoffrey.crisp@adelaide.edu.au

†University of Adelaide, edward.palmer@adelaide.edu.au

‡University of Adelaide, deborah.turnbull@adelaide.edu.au

**University of Adelaide, ted.nettelbeck@psychology.adelaide.edu.au

††University of Adelaide, psyl-war@psychology.adelaide.edu.au

‡‡University of Adelaide, amanda.lecouteur@psychology.adelaide.edu.au

§University of Adelaide, a-sarris@psychology.adelaide.edu.au

¶University of Adelaide, peter.strelan@adelaide.edu.au

||University of Adelaide, luke.schneider@adelaide.edu.au

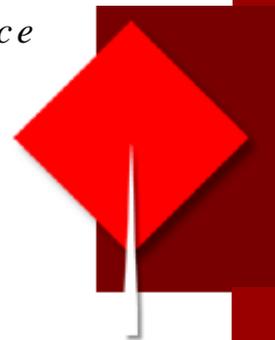
Copyright ©2009 by the authors. *The Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice* is published by the University of Wollongong. URL - <http://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp>

First year student expectations: Results from a university-wide student survey

Geoffrey Crisp, Edward Palmer, Deborah Turnbull, Ted Nettelbeck, Lynn Ward, Amanda LeCouteur, Aspa Sarris, Peter Strelan, and Luke Schneider

Abstract

Although much has been written on the first-year experience of students at higher education institutions, less attention has been directed to the expectations of students when they enter an institution for the first time. This paper provides additional insights into the expectations of students at an Australian university and highlights areas in which students' expectations may not necessarily align with the realities of common university practices. By providing opportunities for students to articulate their expectations, staff are able to use the responses for a constructive dialogue and work towards a more positive alignment between perceived expectations and levels of student satisfaction with their experience.



**First year student expectations:
Results from a university-wide student
survey**

Geoffrey Crisp, Edward Palmer

Centre for Learning and Professional Development

University of Adelaide, Adelaide, Australia

geoffrey.crisp@adelaide.edu.au

edward.palmer@adelaide.edu.au

**Deborah Turnbull, Ted Nettelbeck, Lynn Ward,
Amanda LeCouteur, Aspa Sarris, Peter Strelan and
Luke Schneider**

School of Psychology

University of Adelaide, Adelaide, Australia

deborah.turnbull@adelaide.edu.au

ted.nettelbeck@psychology.adelaide.edu.au

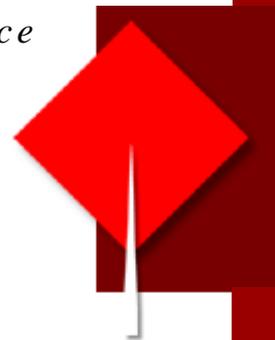
psyl-war@psychology.adelaide.edu.au

amanda.lecouteur@psychology.adelaide.edu.au

a-sarris@psychology.adelaide.edu.au

peter.strelan@adelaide.edu.au

luke.schneider@adelaide.edu.au



Abstract

Although much has been written on the first-year experience of students at higher education institutions, less attention has been directed to the expectations of students when they enter an institution for the first time. This paper provides additional insights into the expectations of students at an Australian university and highlights areas in which students' expectations may not necessarily align with the realities of common university practices. By providing opportunities for students to articulate their expectations, staff are able to use the responses for a constructive dialogue and work towards a more positive alignment between perceived expectations and levels of student satisfaction with their experience.

Introduction

The life of a university student is complex. A student must juggle the often conflicting priorities associated with his/her current academic, family, social and paid employment responsibilities in order to complete their university studies successfully, while maintaining a lifestyle that satisfies their personal and social needs. Students enrol in university programs for disparate reasons (Batchelor, 2006; Briggs, 2006) and their reasons for continuing, or discontinuing, their studies are complex (Zepke, 2006). Universities in all countries are under increasing pressure to improve retention rates for students, especially between the first and second year of programs. Significant resources are being allocated to recording, analysing and responding to student feedback on the first-year university experience (Krause, Hartley, James & McInnis, 2005; Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005). University culture, and its disparate manifestations at the discipline level, often presents new and confusing expectations to the majority of first-year students. In order to navigate a successful pathway through these expectations different levels of support from the university, family and peers may be required. Recognising that the transition from secondary school to university is a major challenge for students, most universities now organise specific transition programs for students new to the institution. These induction programs often include information on how students can successfully manage their conflicting priorities and balance their study, work and social life.

Although there has been significant investigation of the first-year *experience* of students, fewer studies have focused on the *expectations* of students commencing their university studies (Miller, Bender & Schuh, 2005). In the USA, the College Student Expectations Questionnaire (CSXQ) was developed to survey students on their beliefs about what college was going to be like and how they would spend their first year of life at the institution (Kuh & Pace, 1999). Kuh, Gonyea & Williams (2005) examined factors influencing students' expectations and concluded that the strongest were cognitive and psychological. These included ability (expected grades), educational aspirations (higher degree possibilities), motivation (hours expected to study) and a pre-existing positive attitude to university (expecting to like university). Socioeconomic differences accounted for little variance in expectations, as did the type of institution attended.

The recently promoted Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) is a survey tool available to colleges and universities in the United States seeking students' perceptions of what their experience is going to be like (BCSSE). In 2007, 126 North American colleges and universities conducted the survey with over 100,000 first-year students. Although the results from these surveys are not publicly available in collated format, some individual institutions publish data from their own surveys (see for example IUSB and SCSU). The BCSEE is designed to complement the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE); it allows institutions to gather information on student expectations so that the institution can better respond to those expectations. Kuh (2007) has commented on a number of issues arising from BCSEE studies, including the fact that first-year students expect to study more hours and achieve a higher grade than is borne out in reality; that over half of university students expect not to have significant contact with their teachers, and that a significant majority of students expect their institution to provide support for non-academic activities and social interaction.

There is sometimes a significant difference between the students' expectations and the experience that institutions are prepared to offer. This may arise because students have unrealistic expectations of what will transpire during their time at university; it may also arise because of misunderstandings associated with the information provided by the institution about its culture or because the institution is simply unaware of the students' expectations. University teachers and service providers may make erroneous assumptions about students' needs, as universities tend to provide information to students based on the institutions' expectations, not those of the student (Pithers & Holland, 2006).

Why should institutions care about students' expectations? Students' expectations, and their experience during their first year, have a tangible influence on student engagement and retention (Longden, 2006). Institutions that are interested in influencing student retention rates need to approach the issue from several directions. One of these is to provide better alignment between student expectations and the reality of the first-year experience. This alignment can be facilitated by either changing students' expectations to better match the reality of the university experience or by the institution changing some of its approaches to student engagement to better match the students' needs.

Smith & Wertlieb (2005) compared first-year students' social and academic expectations with their experiences at the middle and end of their first year of college in the USA. They reported a significant misalignment between students' academic and social expectations and their first-year experiences; additionally, they reported that neither academic or social expectations, nor first-year experiences, were good predictors of first-year academic achievement. This study also found that students with unrealistic academic expectations tended to have lower first-year grades compared to those students with average or low expectations of their academic ability.

The 10-year longitudinal national study of Australian first-year students' attitudes and experiences has highlighted the increasing hours of paid employment undertaken by first-year students, the increased strategic decisions students make about balancing their time for social activities and study, and a decrease in the number of hours that students are prepared to spend attending classes and studying (Krause, Hartley, James & McInnis, 2005). In line with American studies, students in Australia tend to be reasonably satisfied with their university experience, although they are less engaged with full-time study and feel that teachers are not readily available, nor willing to spend time with individual students. This study also found that first-year students tend to be adequately informed about university culture and that, on the whole, expectations and experience are reasonably aligned. However, some subgroups of students did report that their experiences have not matched their expectations, in particular international students.

This paper provides additional insights into the expectations of students, new to university study, arriving at an Australian research-intensive university. In particular, it highlights areas in which student expectations may not necessarily align with the realities of available resources or with standard university practices. It also provides an opportunity for university teachers to acknowledge, reflect on, and ultimately determine which, student expectations can reasonably be met within the available resources.

Methodology

Student survey

A paper-based student survey was conducted in late February 2006 and again in 2007 during orientation week sessions (see Appendix 1 for the 2007 version of the survey). Human Research Ethics approval was given for this survey. The survey was designed to provide an insight into the expectations of students arriving at a research intensive Australian university before they had experienced any formal classes. The survey questions were designed after considering the items in the BCSEE and the Australian first year experience surveys conducted through the Centre for Study in Higher Education, University of Melbourne. The authors also considered comments from academic staff about their perceptions of the amount of time required for students to engage meaningfully with university courses and the amount of time academic staff were prepared to spend providing feedback to students. These are common items in the surveys discussed earlier. Question 13, concerning attendance at lectures, was written as a negative statement in 2006 and a positive statement in 2007 to compare the distribution of responses. Students were handed a single, double-sided survey sheet

during either a scheduled orientation week information session or during a scheduled computer familiarisation session; students completed the survey at the distribution location and returned the form to one of the project officers. The survey was comprised of 19 items; 7 items gathered demographic information, 10 items measured the students' expectations of university study and 2 open-ended items. In 2007, there were minor modifications to some of the questions, but the structure of the items was the same as in 2006. Survey results were analysed using SPSS using simple bivariate correlations.

Staff Focus Groups

As part of the analysis of the student expectation survey results it was considered important to determine the reaction of university lecturers to the students' expectations. Focus groups were conducted in 2006, for each of the broad program areas and consisted of volunteer representatives from the general discipline areas identified in the student responses from the expectations survey. Invitations for any interested academic to participate in a focus group were extended through the relevant Faculty Associate Dean for learning and teaching. Each focus group involved participants receiving the summary report of the overall student responses and a detailed report from their broad discipline areas at least a week prior to a face-to-face meeting of the group with a project facilitator. The facilitator asked a series of structured questions about staff reactions to the student responses. Five focus group sessions involving a total of 33 participants were recorded and analysed for common threads.

Results

Student survey

The overall summary of demographic data for the 2006 and 2007 surveys appear in Table 1. Students also identified the broad program area in which they were enrolled. The profile of students completing the survey was similar for 2006 and 2007; there was an approximately equal distribution of male and female respondents, approximately one-fifth of responses could be associated with international students, approximately three-quarters of the respondents were recent school-leavers and the vast majority were attending university for the first time on a full-time basis. This profile of respondents is consistent with the total student population entering the University for both years.

For some broad program areas the demographic profile of respondents differed significantly from the overall summary. For example, in the broad arts, health sciences and music areas, females represented approximately 70% of the respondents, whereas for computer sciences males represented 80% and for mathematics 70% of respondents. Economics, commerce and music had higher than the average international student respondents, whereas agricultural science, arts, law and health sciences had fewer international student respondents. These data are broadly consistent with the number of international students in different program areas in the institution.

Respondents were also asked to select from a specified list of options as to why they chose their particular program. Overall, 'interest in the area' was the major reason selected by respondents, with 'improving job prospects' the second most frequently chosen option. The least frequently chosen option was 'family expectations'. Interestingly, only 14% of respondents chose the reason for enrolling in their current program as 'developing talents and creative abilities'. Some interesting variations were observed for some program areas; for music respondents, 'family expectations' was selected more often than the average, and for economics/commerce respondents, 'improving job prospects' was selected more often than the average. Agricultural science respondents gave the highest preference to 'interest in the area' and commerce/economics respondents the lowest for this option overall.

Year	2006	2007
Number of respondents	979	1774
Male	51.9 %	47.9%
Female	48.1%	52.0%
Last 5 years lived mainly in this state	70.9%	73.1%
Last 5 years lived interstate	6.8%	8.1%
Last 5 years lived overseas	22.3%	18.7%
Under 20 years of age	73.5%	78.4%
Between 20-24 years of age	17.7%	16.7%
25 years and above	8.7%	4.8%
First year at university	90.3%	87.5%
Full time	96.4%	97.2%
Part time	3.6%	2.4%

Table 1 Overall summary of demographic data for 2006 and 2007 surveys

The overall responses to the Likert-scale survey questions are summarised in Table 2. Where the question differed between 2006 and 2007, the wording has been included in the Table. For the majority of questions, the distribution of responses was similar for the two surveys. Most students appeared to have confidence in their ability to combine paid work and study. Nevertheless, about one-fifth were uncertain and a smaller proportion thought they may have difficulty combining the two activities. The students who reported that they would have difficulty combining their study with paid work, also reported expecting to spend more time in private/independent study than those who agreed. There appeared to be an age effect, with students over the age of 25 more likely to disagree with the notion that they could successfully combine paid work with study. Students under 20 years of age were more likely to agree that they could successfully combine study with paid work.

Students new to university clearly thought that having 'ready' access to teaching staff would be important to their success. Overall, more females than males agreed with this statement, with no significant difference observed between responses from international and domestic students.

The question on the importance of attending lectures was asked in the negative format in 2006, partly to determine if students were reading the questions appropriately and whether they were responding by randomly picking options on the left side of the survey form. In 2006, 81% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement as worded, indicating that they thought it was important for them to attend most lectures. The question was asked in the positive format in 2007, and an even higher percentage indicated that it was important to attend. The lower percentage of respondents reporting that it was important to attend most lectures in 2006 may be a result of the question wording. Males were more likely to disagree with this statement than females, as were students under 25 years of age. Those students who reported that it would not be important for them to attend most lectures were also more likely to report having outside activities that they believed might impact on their ability to study.

Question	Strongly agree + agree %		Not sure %		Strongly disagree + disagree %	
I expect to be able to combine study with paid work (2006)	71		20		7	
	68		22		9	
Having 'ready' access to my lecturers and tutors outside of face-to-face teaching will be important to my success (2006)	87		11		1	
	87		11		1	
Interactive sessions with other students will be important to my learning (2006)	85		13		1	
	81		13		1	
It will not be important for me to attend most lectures (2006)	11		7		81	
	96		3		0	
It will be important for me to attend most lectures (2007)	96		3		0	
	92		6		1	
I expect my teachers to read drafts of my work (2006)	52		33		15	
	92		6		1	
Feedback on my DRAFTS of work will be important to my learning (2007)	92		6		1	
	91		6		2	
I anticipate that university life will be different to high school (2006)	91		6		2	
	93		4		2	
How much time per week do you expect to spend in study outside of scheduled class times? (2006)	0-5 h	6-10 h	11-15 h	16-20 h	>20 h	
	6	22	32	22	15	
	4	27	33	20	14	
What is the acceptable time for having your essays/work examined and returned to you? (2006)	1 week		2-3 weeks		4-6 weeks	
	34		57		4	
	38		55		3	

Table 2 Overall summaries of Likert-scale responses for 2006 and 2007 surveys

In 2006 almost half of the respondents reported that they expected teachers to read drafts of their work. As discussed in more detail below, this question was considered controversial by teachers, who argued that it might raise expectations that could not be reasonably met within the current level of resources. Males and females were equally represented in this item. International students were more likely to report expecting their drafts to be read, as were those in the 20-24 year age bracket. A greater percentage of full-time students reported expecting teachers to read drafts of their work when compared with part-time students. In 2007 the wording was modified to reflect teachers' concerns; the revised question asked about feedback for drafts of work being important for learning, and 92% of respondents indicated agreement with this statement.

The vast majority of respondents reported expecting university life and study to be different from high school. For this question there was an opportunity for respondents to provide some text-based comments. These were analysed and coded as shown in Figure 1a. Of those students who agreed or strongly agreed that university life and study would be different to school life, the majority used words concerning greater independence, and more freedom; a reasonable number commented on differences in culture, teaching and resources. For the very few students who reported expecting that university life would not be different from school, the open-ended comments indicated that most attended schools with similar cultures to that of a university (Figure 1b). However, this number was very small overall and general conclusions cannot be drawn from these responses.

In relation to the question about how much time they expected to spend studying outside of scheduled class times, responses were similar across the two survey years: 69% (2006) and 67% (2007) of all students reported expecting to spend at least 11 hours in private/independent study per week, with 37% (2006) and 34% (2007) expecting to spend more than 16 hours per week. Fewer students, 28% (2006) and 31% (2007), reported expecting to spend less than 10 hours a week in private study. The amount of time that students reported expecting to spend in private/independent study was not influenced by gender or age, nor by whether the student was an international or domestic enrolment. There was also no significant difference between the time that full-time and part-time students reported expecting to spend in private study. In relation to the question about a time-frame for the return of assessed work, the majority of students, 57% (2006) and 55% (2007), agreed that a period of two to three weeks was acceptable. Fewer students, 34% (2006) and 38% (2007), indicated one week to be an acceptable turn-around time. It will be interesting to see if this trend in diminishing time expected for returning work continues with future surveys. Only 5% of all students reported that four weeks or more would be an acceptable time to have their assessments marked and returned. International students were more likely to expect assignments to be returned within one week; Australian students were more likely to expect assignments to be returned within two to three weeks. Full-time students generally expected a more rapid turn around time than did part-time students.

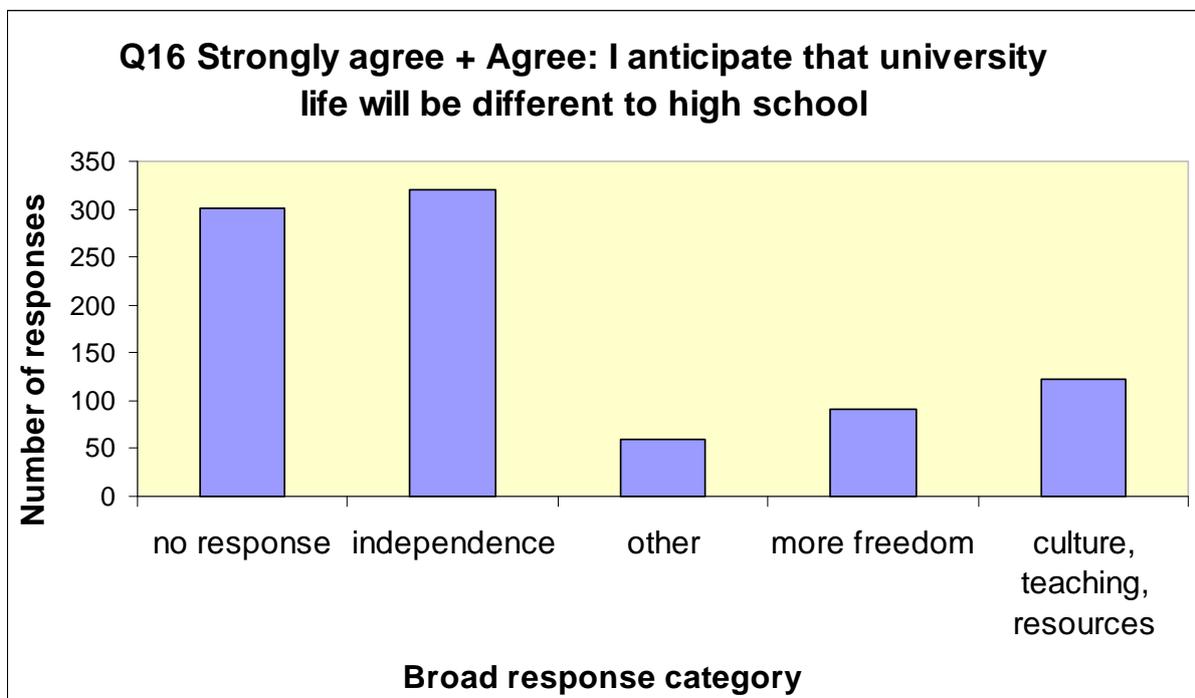


Figure 1a

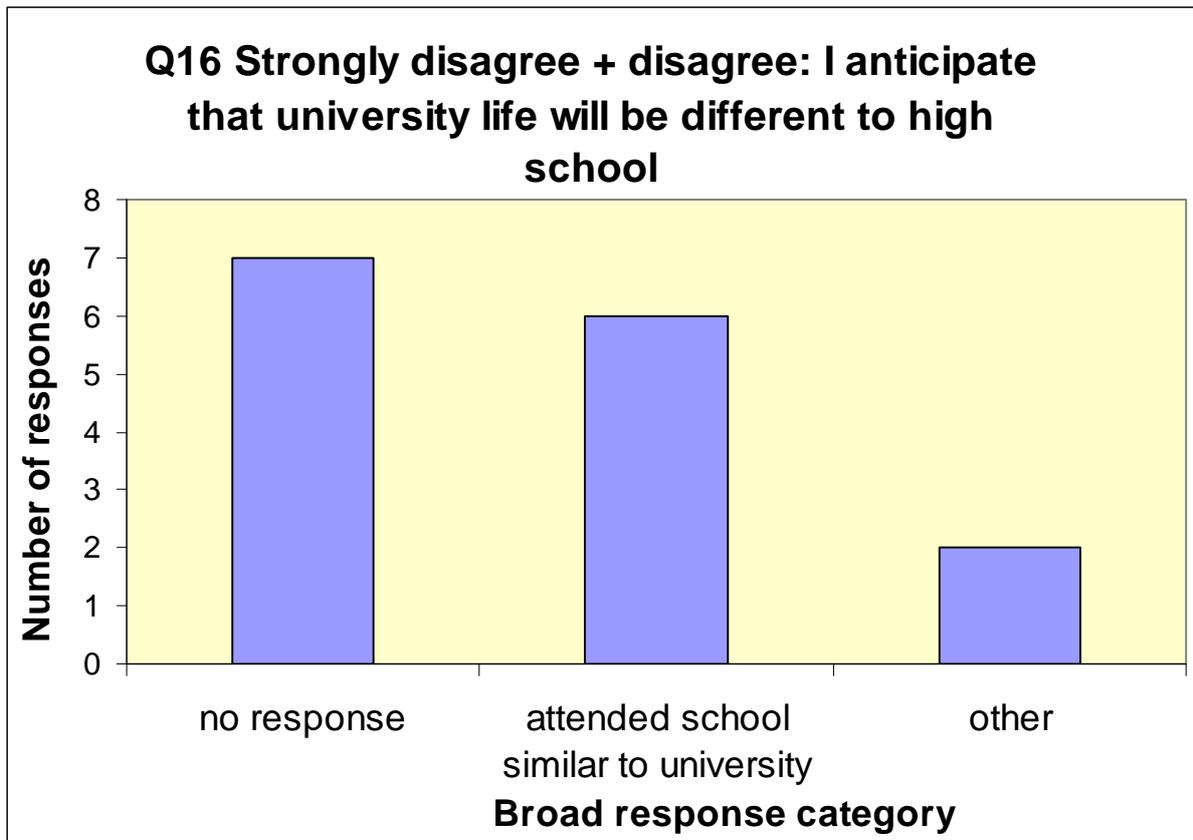


Figure 1b

Students were asked an open-ended question “What do you think will be important for making your university experience successful?” Most respondents provided comments that indicated they believed they would be responsible for their own success. For those respondents who indicated some form of self-responsibility, common features included a realisation that success depended on hard work and study, that time management skills would be required, that balance in life/study would be necessary, and that friends and family would be important for support (Figures 2a and 2b).

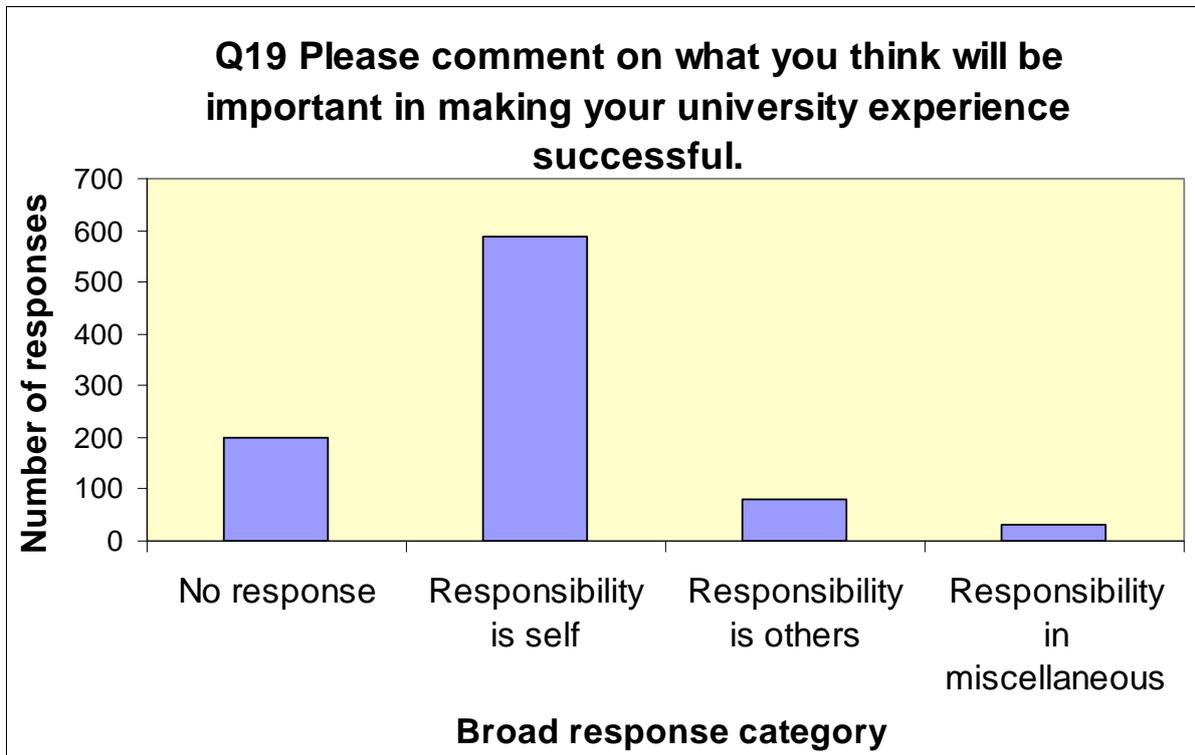


Figure 2a

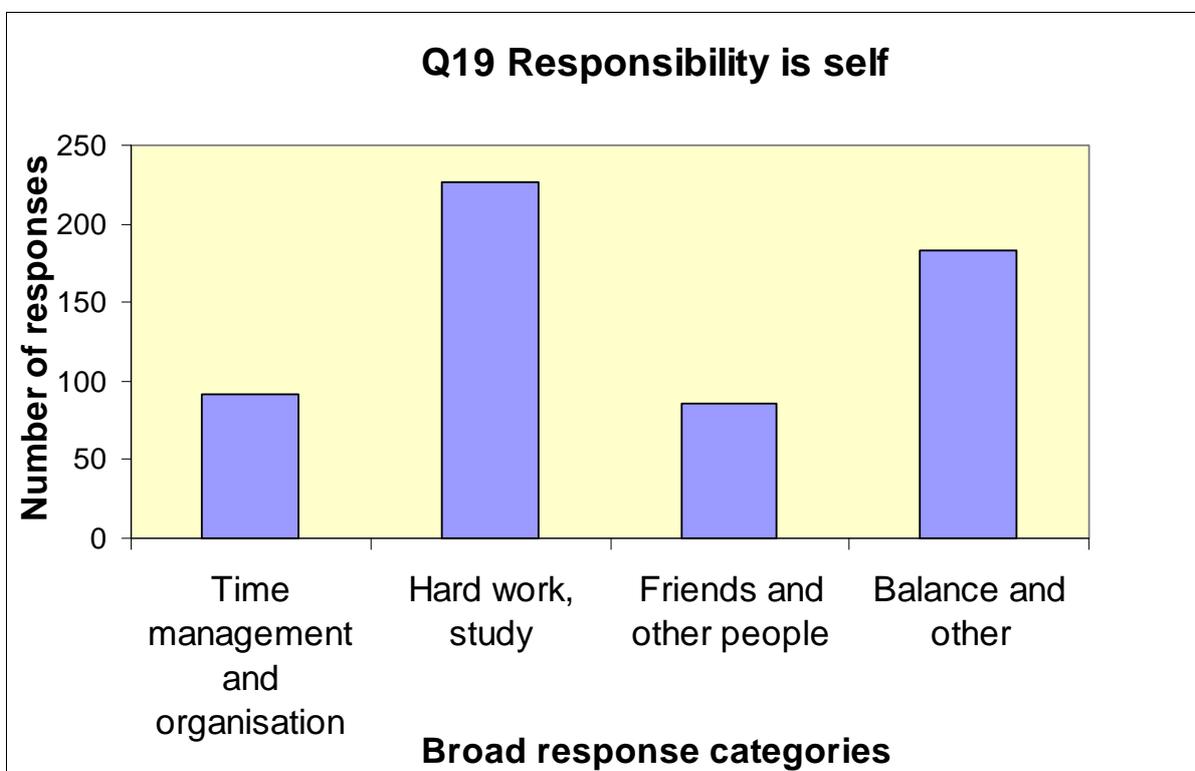


Figure 2b

Staff Focus Groups

The structured focus group was not attempting to reach a concordance amongst the participants; rather its purpose was to determine whether commonly held opinions would emerge from the group. The results from these focus groups have been analysed by identifying commonly agreed statements or assertions that were articulated across the groups. Both facilitators listened to the audio recordings of the focus groups and categorized the responses thematically. The results have been summarized below.

Question 1: What was your initial reaction to the idea of a student expectation survey?

In all 5 discipline groups, staff readily agreed that the concept of surveying incoming students about their expectations was a useful and important source of information. Staff reported that they had anecdotal information about students' expectations but that the survey provided quantitative data. There was general agreement that expectation surveys should be conducted on a regular basis and that surveys comparing students' expectations with their experiences would provide complementary information. The issue of what staff were expected to do with the results was raised by all groups, as was the issue of such surveys potentially raising expectation levels.

Question 2: Do you think the survey is useful for staff?

Participants indicated that the survey data was very useful and would be of particular use for course advisors. It was also suggested that several of the issues raised by the survey responses should be included in course guides. Staff were keen to see the survey conducted across all areas of the university so that any differences in responses across discipline areas could be analysed, and for the results of the survey to be made available in the first few weeks of the teaching term. Staff agreed that by being provided with quantitative data on students' expectations early they could reflect on how they would respond to those expectations.

Question 3: Do you think you would use the results as a discussion point with your colleagues?

Although all staff agreed that they would discuss the results from the survey with their colleagues, only some had already undertaken this activity. The results had been discussed at some School and Faculty committee meetings as well as at the University Learning and Teaching Committee level. A number of the focus group participants had been part of these discussions. Staff agreed that the survey results would be a crucial component in determining approaches to the first-year experience program.

Question 4: Do you think you would use the results as a discussion point with your students?

Staff were consistent in their assertions that the survey results would form an excellent basis upon which to discuss course and program expectations with students. There was a general belief that students' expectations were unrealistic in relation to hours of study, the level of feedback that would be available for formative activities and the time to return marked assessments. Many of the staff in the focus groups thought students' expectations should be discussed early in the teaching term with the view to modifying those expectations so that they better matched the current realities of university culture. Nevertheless, it was acknowledged that both staff and students would need to better align their respective expectations so that better outcomes would result from the learning and teaching process.

Question 5: Were there any particular responses, which surprised you?

Most staff were generally aware of students spending significant time in paid employment and thought that students were overly optimistic about their ability successfully to combine full-time study with significant levels of paid employment. By far the most surprising response for staff concerned students expectation that staff would read drafts of their work; this was seen as being unrealistic in the current

circumstances in university, especially in large classes. For many staff the fact that at least a third of respondents thought that marked work would be returned within a week was considered unrealistic.

Staff also expressed surprise that students felt interactive work with other students would be important for their learning, as staff experience has been that students often expressed concern about undertaking group work. Some staff were surprised that students expected “ready access” to lecturers outside of class times, as this appeared to be inconsistent with the experience of most of members of the focus group who reported that students rarely attended advertised sessions in which academics made themselves available for consultation. One commonly reported change in student behaviour was increased use of email as a standard method for asking questions of academic staff, and the challenge this posed in terms of responding to such emails.

Question 6: Were there any particular responses, which did not surprise you?

There was very little response to this question.

Question 7: Were there any particular responses which you disagreed with?

Of most concern was the proposition that individual students expected to have drafts of their work read by academic staff. Although this practice was undertaken in some areas, it was not common for large classes. Some staff were particularly concerned that including this question in the survey might raise students’ expectation that this was ‘common practice’, and some staff indicated that this had transpired in some discipline areas. Staff also expressed concern about students who expected to be successful in their study yet thought that they need not attend all scheduled classes. Staff realized that students were under increasing financial pressure but felt that full-time study meant that students should commit to attending all scheduled classes. Staff were concerned that students were expecting to spend less time in private study than is normally recommended, and were particularly surprised that the students’ responses to this question did not vary across disciplines.

Question 8: Which students’ expectations need to be changed?

Staff reiterated their concerns expressed under Question 7 and felt students’ expectations in relation to hours of study, reading drafts of work and attending all scheduled classes needed to be discussed with them. Overwhelmingly staff felt that students had to be informed about the unrealistic nature of some of the expectations, so that a shared understanding of the reality of university life could be reached.

Question 9: Do you feel you need to change your practices?

There was a feeling that greater dialogue with students over the issues raised by the survey would be worthwhile, but overall, staff felt it would be difficult to change current practices. The reasons given were that they felt they were working as hard as possible already, and a concern that students did not make enough use of resources already available to them. There was a feeling that greater dialogue with students over the issues raised by the survey would be worthwhile.

Discussion

Expectations on commitment

A generally accepted indicator of student engagement is the time devoted to study, including attendance at formal classes and time spent on campus. In the current expectation survey, the majority of students acknowledged that it would be important for them to attend lectures. This expectation is not aligned with results reported in a longitudinal study of first-year students in Australia, which has documented that full-time students are spending less time on campus and attending fewer

formal class sessions (Krause, Hartley, James & McInnis, 2005). This same study has highlighted the progressive increase in the proportion of full-time students in paid employment and the increased number of hours spent in paid employment. Despite the majority of students in this survey reporting that they could balance their time commitment to study and work, the reality of the situation is that it appears to be a less likely scenario. For students who rely on a variable and uncertain income to pay for their basic necessities such as food and rent, or even basic travel and social expenses, the priority behaviour is to attend paid work rather than attend lectures. Universities are attempting to respond to this change in students' study patterns by providing video/audio files of lectures, which students can download and listen to in their own time. The purpose of face-to-face lectures is under increasing discussion in higher education, as more students use alternative methods to access course materials and lectures (Chang, 2007). If university lectures are to continue to attract face-to-face audiences then lecturers will need to engage students in interactive activities that are dependent on the students being physically in the same location at the same time.

Nearly 40% of students surveyed reported that they had outside activities that might affect their ability to study. A further 30% reported being unsure whether their outside activities would have such an effect. Lecturers can assist students by reminding them that success at University is typically dependent on the time committed to studies (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). When students were asked about the time they expected to spend on independent study, they gave varied responses. This suggests that students may not be well informed about the workload that is typically associated with full-time university study. Lecturers could again assist students by incorporating explicit guidelines on student workload models in course and program documentation; including guidelines on formal contact times, private study time as well as typical times to complete the various assessment tasks. This is an important consideration based on the finding that over 70% of students reported that they expect to be able to combine their studies with paid work. Communicating to students the time commitment required outside of class for successful university study would enable them to make better informed decisions regarding combining study with paid employment.

Expectations based on resources

This survey has shown that students have a number of expectations, which, if met, would have major ramifications for staffing and budgeting at most universities. The first is students' expectation that drafts of their work will be read. The second is that the turnaround time for marking assignments was expected, by more than a third of students, to be less than a week. The third expectation was that students would have 'ready' access to staff for consultations.

The survey results showed that over half of the students surveyed in 2006 expected teachers to read drafts of their work, and over 90% in 2007 agreed that obtaining feedback on drafts of their work would be important to their learning. This expectation was of major concern to lecturers during the focus groups as they acknowledged that, in the majority of situations, it would be difficult to provide extensive, personal feedback on formative work. Lecturers did acknowledge that they were exploring methods for the timely provision of feedback to students on formative tasks, but also admitted that this was a significant workload issue. Teachers also acknowledged that discussing expectations around the provision of timely feedback with students would be a useful strategy to assist in managing expectations. Students would also benefit from a general discussion of the concept of self-directed learning, and the importance of being able to evaluate and edit their own work. In order to assist students' understanding in these areas, lecturers could provide students with appropriate exemplars of student work at different grading levels. The student survey results indicated that international students were more likely to expect to have drafts of their work read, highlighting the importance of dialogue between lecturers and students about the extent of support provided for individual students and the extent to which students could utilise specialist support services provided within the institution.

About one-third of students expected their assessments to be marked and returned to them within one week and lecturers thought this was an unreasonable expectation, given the current staff workload models; two to three weeks was seen as more realistic and this matched the expectations of half of the students surveyed. Again, staff thought this was a good point to discuss with students early in the semester.

The majority of students expected to have 'ready' access to their lecturers and tutors outside of scheduled classes. Some lecturers commented that they made themselves available outside of class time but that very few students attended these sessions; a number of staff also commented on the increased use of electronic forms of communication and the fact that students often expected a rapid turn around on responses to email queries. Only a few lecturers made systematic use of the electronic noticeboard features within the learning management system within the institution. This would be a convenient method for communicating with a large number of students with common issues, but does not assist with large numbers of individual issues. Lecturers could also facilitate communication between students by providing access to electronic noticeboards where students could post their own questions and answers. Electronic noticeboards and fora also assist students from non-English speaking backgrounds as they can access information or pose questions in less public ways. As students are spending less time on campus, universities will need to adapt their approaches to the provision of staff-student consultation times and make more effective use of mobile and electronic forms of communication.

With all of these resource implications, universities may need to reconceptualise the traditional relationships between measures of service quality and students' expectations and satisfaction levels. Traditional customer satisfaction surveys are predicated on a positive outcome resulting from an appropriate alignment between the initial customer expectations and the perceived quality of the performance or service delivered. Student satisfaction levels are related to their expectations; when students' perceived expectations are met they have higher levels of satisfaction (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006).

Conclusion

This students' expectations survey has provided useful data and insights on the attitudes and expectations of students who are new to university study. Some of the survey data was surprising and of concern to lecturers, especially expectations that are not readily realisable within current resources, and practices such as the provision of personalised feedback on drafts of work. The focus groups with lecturers highlighted the need for ongoing dialogue between students and staff so that a better alignment can be achieved between students' expectations and the reality of university study and culture.

If universities provide opportunities for students to be able to articulate their expectations, and then use the students' responses as the basis of constructive dialogue between staff and students, there should be a more positive alignment between perceived expectations and levels of student satisfaction with the quality of their experience.

References

- Appleton-Knapp, S.L. & Krentler, K.A. (2006). Measuring Student Expectations and their Effects on Satisfaction: The Importance of Managing Student Expectations. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 28; 254-264.
- Batchelor, D. (2006). Becoming what you want to be. *London Review of Education*, 4 (3), 225-238.

BCSSE (Beginning College Survey for Student Engagement), <http://www.bcsse.iub.edu> [Accessed 7 June 2009].

Briggs, S. (2006). An exploratory study of the factors influencing undergraduate student choice: the case of higher education in Scotland. *Studies in Higher Education*, 31 (6), 705-722.

Chang, S. (2007). Academic perceptions of the use of Lectopia: A University of Melbourne example. In *ICT: Providing choices for learners and learning*. Proceedings ASCILITE Singapore 2007. <http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/singapore07/procs/chang.pdf> [Accessed 7 June 2009].

IUSB (Indiana University South Bend), <http://www.iusb.edu/~iusboir/BCSSE.shtml> [Accessed 7 June 2009].

SCSU (Southern Connecticut State University) Reports: Office of Assessment and Planning. <http://www.southernct.edu/academics/academicaffairs/assess/reports/> [Accessed 7 June 2009].

Kift, S. & Nelson, K. (2005). Beyond curriculum reform: Embedding the transition experience. In Brew, A. and Asmar, C. (Eds), *Proceedings of the 28th HERDSA Conference*, 225-235. http://www.herdsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/conference/2005/pdf/refereed/paper_294.pdf [Accessed 7 June 2009].

Krause, K., Hartley, R., James, R. & McInnis, C. The First Year Experience in Australian Universities: Findings from a Decade of National Studies. *Centre for the Study of Higher Education University of Melbourne*, Final Report January 2005. <http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/pdfs/FYEReport05KLK.pdf> [Accessed 7 June 2009].

Kuh, G.D. (2007). What Student Engagement Data Tell Us About College Readiness. *Peer Review*, Association of American Colleges and Universities, Winter 2007, 4-8.

Kuh, G.D., Gonyea, R.M. & Williams, J.M. (2005). What students expect from college and what they get. In *Promoting Reasonable Expectations: Aligning student and institutional views of the college experience*, T.E. Miller, B.E. Bender, J.H. Schuh & Associates (Eds). Jossey Bass, San Francisco, CA.

Kuh, G.D. Nelson Laird, T.F. & Umbach, P.D. (2004). Aligning Faculty Activities. *Liberal Education*, 90 (4), 24-31.

Kuh, G.D. & Pace, C.R. (1999). College student expectations questionnaire (2nd Ed). Bloomington: Center for Postsecondary Research, Indiana University.

Longden, B. (2006). An Institutional Response to Changing Student Expectations and their Impact on Retention Rates. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 28, (2), 173-187.

Miller, T.E., Bender, B.E. & Schuh, J.H. (2005). Promoting reasonable expectations: Aligning student and institutional views of the college experience. Jossey Bass, San Francisco, CA.

NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement) <http://nsse.iub.edu/index.cfm>. [Accessed 7 June 2009].

Pithers, B. & Holland, T. (2006). Student Expectations and the Effect of Experience. Australian Association for Research in Education Conference, Adelaide, Australia. <http://www.aare.edu.au/06pap/pit06290.pdf> [Accessed 7 June 2009].

Smith, J.S. & Wertlieb, E.C. (2005). Do First-Year College Students' Expectations Align with their First-Year Experiences? *NASPA Journal*, 42 (2). <http://publications.naspa.org/naspajournal/vol42/iss2/art2> [Accessed 7 June 2009].

Wilcox, P., Winn, S. & Fyvie-Gauld, M. (2005). It was nothing to do with the university, it was just the people: The role of social support in the first-year experience of higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 30 (6), 707-722.

Zepke, N. (2006). Being learner centred: one way to improve student retention? *Studies in Higher Education*, 31 (5), 587-600.

Appendix 1: Student survey

- Q1. What is your gender? i. Male ii. Female
- Q2. In the last 5 years I have lived mainly: i. In South Australia ii. In another Australian state
iii. Overseas
- Q3. Which age group are you in? i. Under 20 years ii. 20 to 24 years iii. 25 years and over
- Q4. Is this your first year studying at a university? i. Yes ii. No
- Q5. What is your enrolment status? i. Full-time ii. Part-time
- Q6. Which program area are you enrolled in? (Mark as many as apply)
i. Arts ii. Agricultural Science iii. Computer Science iv. Economics/Commerce
v. Education/Architecture vi. Engineering vii. Health Science viii. Law
ix. Mathematics x. Medical/Dental xi. Music xii. Science
- Q7. What are your reasons for choosing this program? (Mark as many as apply)
i. To study a field that really interests me ii. To improve my job prospects
iii. To develop my talents and creative abilities iv. To get training for a specific job
v. To meet expectations of my parents or family vi. Please specify below if other:
- Q8. How much time per week do you expect to spend in study outside of scheduled class times?
i. 0 - 5 hours ii. 6 - 10 hours iii. 11 - 15 hours iv. 16 - 20 hours v. > 20 hours

The following questions use the 5-point Likert scale:

- i. Strongly Agree ii. Agree iii. Not Sure iv. Disagree v. Strongly Disagree**
- Q9. I expect to be able to combine study with paid work
- Q10. Having 'ready' access to my lecturers and tutors outside of face-to-face teaching will be important to my success
- Q11. Feedback on my submitted work will be important to my learning
- Q12. Feedback on my DRAFTS of work will be important to my learning
- Q13. It will be important for me to attend most lectures
- Q14. I have activities outside of the University that might affect my ability to study
- Q15. Working with other students in class time will be important to my learning
- Q16. I anticipate that studying at university will be different to studying at high school (Please comment below)
- Q17. What is the acceptable time for having your submitted work marked and returned to you?
i. 1 Week ii. 2–3 Weeks iii. 4–6 Weeks iv. > 6 Weeks

Open-ended questions:

- Q18. Why do you think a University of Adelaide degree is important to your life?
- Q19. What do you think will be important for making your university experience successful?