

Student Feedback - 2016 Yearlong Humanities Courses Executive Summary: January 2017

"I think U3A provides a wonderful yearlong program and also a very important service. It keeps people active, motivated and inspired. There is a great variety of subjects to choose from- it has been a great bonus in my retirement."

Introduction

During 2016 written student feedback was reintroduced for yearlong courses, commencing with the Humanities program. Students in 15 courses (literature, creative writing, history and philosophy) were electronically surveyed, with 220 members providing feedback, representing 71% of all enrolled students with email. As in the earlier 2010 survey, feedback was very positive about the tutors professionalism in running of their course, the enjoyment and benefits students derived.

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 the topic area (81%) or wanted to deepen their skills and knowledge in that area (60%), as well as expecting to meet people with similar interests (30%) and the tutors positive reputation (29%).

"A keen reader, I wanted to be challenged to read the classics and books I would never tackle without guidance."

Importantly, with few exceptions the course very well met or exceeded their expectations (88%).

Students reported significant intellectual and social benefits from their participation in the course. The vast majority (90%) nominated the knowledge gained in the subject area as an important outcome, with 26% also specifying the skills acquired.

"I have learnt about the differing ways various philosophers have looked at the world and how we all have our own way of dealing with life's questions"

"I have greatly increased my knowledge of literature through reading the assigned texts, and importantly put them into literary, social and historical context"

Significantly over a half (58%) identified the companionship derived from course participation as a specific benefit, while 52% reported being motivated and inspired by the tutor/leader and other students.

"I enjoy the company of the group members in the course and also after the sessions when some of us continue our discussions over a cuppa"

Course Delivery

These core benefits to students clearly stemmed from the quality of the program delivered by individual tutors and group leaders. Asked what they *liked most* about the course, students particularly valued the extensive knowledge and professionalism of their tutor, and the stimulating discussions and positive interactions fostered between class members throughout the year.

"The depth of knowledge of the tutor, his friendly disposition and relaxed manner in which he conducts the course"

"I enjoy the interaction between tutor/students as other peoples knowledge assists in growing mine"

In rating specific aspects of course delivery, students strongly endorsed the tutor/leader's knowledge and enthusiasm (89%), their providing a supportive and friendly atmosphere for learning (85%), and encouraging student participation (83%). Respondents strongly agreed that sessions were well-organised (74%), with relevant course content (83%), and were presented in a clear and interesting way (74%).

Various suggestions were also made about new Humanities and Arts topics or extending existing courses, thereby providing guidance to tutors and the Course Coordination Team in further development of the program.

More generally students commented on the diversity and excellence of the overall U3A Melbourne City course program, the stimulation and friendships it provided, and gave recognition and thanks to the tutors and other volunteers whose dedication made it all happen.

"I admire the passion of the tutors and their dedication to the job despite it being a totally voluntary activity"

"I chose to join U3A Melbourne because it offers a wider range of courses than local associations. It is well organised and has greater diversity of members from many different socio economic and cultural backgrounds"

Conclusions

On this basis, it is evident that the 2016 yearlong Humanities program was well run along lines that support learning for mature age students. Additionally, participation in these yearlong courses fostered companionship and friendship between members to a greater extent than noted with short courses feedback. Students voiced their appreciation of the tutors expertise and approach to teaching which achieve both the educational and social goals of the program.

The manifest importance and joy in learning with like-minded, friendly and respectful people moreover fulfils a fundamental aspect of our U3A ethos.

Julie Nankervis

Course Coordination Team