

Abstract of paper: Which students give feedback: An analysis of participation rates and feedback by semester weighted average, as shown at: <http://www.lincoln.ac.nz/News--Events/Conferences/AHEEF-2010/Abstracts/#WhichStudentsgiveFeedback>

Which students give feedback: An analysis of participation rates and feedback by semester weighted average

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Online unit evaluation systems are increasingly used in universities to gather anonymous student feedback. In 2005, Curtin implemented a university-wide system called **eVALUate** for gathering and reporting students' perceptions of their learning experiences. **eVALUate** comprises a unit survey and a teaching survey. The unit survey contains eleven quantitative items and 2 qualitative items. Quantitative items ask students for their perceptions of what helped their achievement of unit learning outcomes (items 1 to 7), their engagement and motivation (items 8 to 10) and overall satisfaction (item 11).

Many staff have embraced and welcomed **eVALUate** but some are more fearful, defensive and sceptical. In 2006, an analysis of 30,000 student comments was undertaken to determine whether students were making abusive comments in **eVALUate** (Oliver, Tucker and Pegden, 2007). One of the findings of this research was that students who have higher grades and are more engaged in their studies are more likely to participate in **eVALUate**. Whilst this research has been useful in allaying staff fears, anecdotal evidence suggests that there is still some belief amongst academic staff that **eVALUate** is predominantly used by academically poorer students to complain unjustly. These staff also believe survey results are negatively impacted by this perceived over-representation of lower performing students.

This study investigated differences in **eVALUate** participation rates by students of different semester weighted averages. The study also examined differences in survey responses by students with different semester weighted averages. Data from 154,821 surveys in four semesters (semesters 1 and 2 in 2008 and 2009) showed that students with higher semester weighted averages were more likely to give feedback. Students with a semester weighted average of 90% and higher were three times more likely to participate than students with a semester weighted average below 50%. Results also revealed that students with a high semester weighted average were more likely to agree with the survey items. This was particularly evident in survey items related to the students' own engagement and motivation, as well as in the overall satisfaction item. Chi square analyses showed that semester weighted average was significantly impacting on response rates and survey results ($p < 0.05$).

This investigation reinforces the previous findings from 2006 and showed that contrary to what some staff believe, students of lower semester weighted averages are less likely to participate in **eVALUate** and this group is under represented. In contrast, students of higher semester weighted averages are more likely to give feedback and are more likely to agree with the survey items. It is likely that higher participation by more academically accomplished and motivated students is skewing results in a positive manner when reporting aggregated university data.