Development of a student evaluation quality culture: the eVALUate experience at Curtin University

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Abstract

The successful development and use of an online student evaluation system has required a significant cultural transformation in teaching and learning at Curtin. An effective quality culture was achieved through leadership with a focus on communication, education and involvement of all stakeholders. All aspects of the system were informed by relevant pedagogy and research into student evaluation of teaching within a university-level outcomes approach to learning. Open and transparent student feedback about student learning informs quality improvement and university-wide strategies to continually improve the student experience at Curtin.

Keywords: student evaluation of teaching and learning, student experience, quality improvement, academic leadership

Background

The student experience in higher education is a culmination of all aspects of university experienced by an individual. This experience includes all aspects of engagement throughout the student life cycle (Coates, 2006; Harvey, 2006; Krause, Hartley, James, & McInnis, 2005), and may include the distinct cultural experience promised by an institution (Baird & Gordon, 2009). Multiple approaches are used in the sector to identify and evaluate the student experience and establish quality improvement approaches. Student, graduate and employer surveys of experiences and outcomes, student progression data (such as retention and pass rates), and employment data are some measures of teaching and learning quality used by universities. In 2009, the Australian Federal Government established the Transforming Australia's Higher Education System policy position as a result of a Review of Australian Higher Education (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008). This review highlighted the need for a strong focus on measuring and monitoring student engagement with a focus on the connection with student's achievement of learning outcomes. New performance indicators have been proposed and a new regulatory body, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) was formed in 2011. With the advent of TEQSA, the Australian sector is currently debating the teaching and learning measures of quality relating to the student experience. The sector is also discussing measures for assuring student's achievement of learning outcomes relative to whether these are quantifying inputs, processes or outputs.

Measures that have been proposed include a new survey (the University Experience Survey), refinement of the Graduate Destination Survey, the assessment of learning outcomes and admission testing (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2012; Coates, 2010; Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2011) and institutions are focusing on evidencing academic and graduate standards using tools and processes.

Student evaluation has been integral to the quality improvement process in universities for over 20 years (Blackmore, 2009; Harvey & Williams, 2010). The use of surveys for quality assurance and enhancement has received mixed responses (Anderson, 2006; Geall, 2000; Harvey & Stensaker, 2008) and whilst there has been a general lack of agreement over the meaning of quality and how it is measured (Brown, Carpenter, Collins, & Winkvist-Noble, 2007; Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; Houston, 2008) student feedback is considered vital in the quality assurance process (Barrie, Ginns, & Prosser, 2005; Blackmore, 2009; Harvey & Williams, 2010; McCormack, 2005; Morgan, 2008; Young, McConkey, & Kirby, 2011). Within the quality improvement framework proposed by Baird and Gordon (2009), student evaluations of their teaching and learning are regarded as a standard assurance mechanism (referred to as normative quality assurance), a process measure which informs the mitigation of risks.

Curtin University is Western Australia's largest and most multi-cultural university with over 47,000 students and including Australia's third largest international student population (more than 40% of students study on or offshore). The University operates out of 16 locations, including Sydney, Malaysia and Singapore and is a major shareholder provider for Open Universities Australia. This chapter describes the events and factors responsible for successfully developing, implementing and embedding Curtin's online student evaluation system (called eVALUate) for the purpose of improving the student experience and for quality assurance. It is well recognised that the development of a quality culture requires organisational change and development (Mustafa & Chiang, 2006). To ensure positive organisational change, the research literature informed all aspects of the process. The following principles outline key features, identified in the literature, that were used to lead the change of Curtin's teaching and learning quality culture: 1) development of a vision and strategy; 2) establishment of a sense of necessity; 3) creation of a guiding leadership team; 4) communication; 5) development of a shared commitment; 6) generation of early successes; 7) consolidation and embedding; and 8) re-evaluation of the system (Mustafa & Chiang, 2006). These principles enabled the successful and largely positive adoption of eVALUate namely: the development of a vision and a need for change; leadership; pedagogy; improving the student learning experience; communication and education; recognition of early successes; consolidation; and evaluation.

Development of a vision and a need for change

A number of events provided the impetus for Curtin to develop a university-wide

evaluation system. The University recognised that quality monitoring should be concerned with improvement and enhancement of student learning (Hodgkinson & Brown, 2003) and that the goal of higher education is to enable the transformation of students, providing them with the skills and abilities to actively contribute to a rapidly changing world (Ramsden, 2003). In Western Australia, a shift in the secondary education system to outcomes-based education and a focus in student-centred learning in the higher education sector provided Curtin with a renewed focus. Curtin developed a learning outcomes philosophy: Excellence in teaching and learning at Curtin (Curtin University, 2003). The tenets within this philosophy articulate Curtin's commitment to student learning through an outcomes-focused approach whereby learning experiences are designed to help students achieve the learning outcomes at unit and course level. The tenets specified that teaching and learning is a partnership between staff and students and that systemic evaluation of teaching and learning is used to ensure quality. The development of the University's stated goals in teaching and learning was at the centre of the vision for developing eVALUate.

In 2000, the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA), formed by the Australian Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, was established as an independent, national quality assurance agency. AUQA was involved in the promotion, auditing and reporting on quality assurance in institutions using a process of institutional self-evaluation (Chalmers, 2007; Woodhouse, 2003). A recommendation from Curtin's first AUQA audit was "that Curtin develop efficient mechanisms for tapping student opinion, translating the feedback into action, and informing students of outcomes and changes made" (Australian Universities Quality Agency, 2009; Sarah, 2003, p.35). At this time, Curtin had no uniform system or instrument for gathering student feedback on units or teachers for university-wide reporting. The University employed a number of instruments (online and paper-based) for student feedback on teaching and learning, aligned with the industrial agreements of the day. Adaptations of the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) were implemented by Curtin Business School (called the Unit Experience Survey) and the School of Physiotherapy (called the Course Experience on the Web) for gathering feedback on units (Dixon & Scott, 2003; Tucker, Jones, Straker, & Cole, 2003). Curtin's Annual Student Satisfaction Survey included some CEQ items to gather feedback on students overall experience of their course. Feedback on teaching was gathered using the Student Evaluation of Educational Quality (SEEQ) paper-based survey on a voluntary basis and the results were confidential to the requesting teacher. The AUQA panel reported that student's did not value the survey and felt over surveyed (Australian Universities Quality Agency, 2009; Sarah, 2003, p.35).

Fortuitously, the Australian government announced performance based funding in 2003 with the introduction of the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund (LTPF) using graduate feedback on teaching and learning, graduate outcomes (employment and further studies), and student progress and retention rates (Department of Education Science and Training, 2004). Eligibility for the LTPF was that universities were required to have a systematic student evaluation system including the reporting of student feedback to the general public. Curtin's failure to be eligible for LTPF

funding in the first round of the scheme and poor ranking within the Australian sector provided the impetus for change within the University and a renewed focus on teaching and learning. These factors provided the sense of necessity and urgency to develop and instigate eVALUate.

Leadership

In order to build an effective institutional online evaluation system, Curtin recognised that a cultural transformation was required. The research literature states that the essential criteria for building an effective quality culture in teaching and learning and evaluation include: leadership, policy and planning, information and analysis, people, client focus, key processes and outcomes (Marshall, Orrell, Cameron, Bosanquet, & Thomas, 2011; Sorenson & Reiner, 2003). The complex roles and skills demonstrated by the leaders in managing the development and implementation of eVALUate were consistent with the managerial leadership capabilities described within the Competing Values Framework (CVF) (Amey, 2006; Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; Zulu, Murray, & Strydom, 2004) and are highlighted within this paper.

In 2005, a Student Evaluation of Learning and Teaching (SELT) Steering Committee was established to lead the development of a university-wide evaluation system comprising: the Pro-Vice Chancellor Adacemic (PVCA) (Chair); Deans of Teaching and Learning; academic representatives from each teaching faculty; a Student Guild representative; academic experts in survey design; an elected academic representative; support services and key staff from the Office of Teaching and Learning. The academic staff from the Office of Teaching and Learning formed the guiding leadership team who led the developments, and communicated continuously with the wider university community. The SELT Steering Committee met fortnightly and reported to the University Teaching and Learning Committee and subsequently to Academic Board. The task of the Committee was to oversee the development and implementation of a university-wide system for gathering and reporting student perceptions of learning and teaching. Consistent with most universities, the system was designed for: 1) the purpose of quality improvement, 2) informing professional development, 3) rewarding academic performance, 4) informing promotion processes, and 5) as key performance measures for university executive and those discharged with leadership in teaching and for learning outcomes (Barrie, Ginns, and Symons, 2008; Shah and Nair, 2012).

The leadership team focused on the enhancement of the student experience using a transformational quality approach: putting the student at the heart of the process, using a transparent bottom-up approach to continuous improvement and being responsive and open as a means of gaining trust (Wilson, Lizzio, & Ramsden, 1997). In order to enact transformational change, the leadership had to ensure they understood the culture and values of the organisation (Amey, 2006). A major feature to the success of the leadership team was their extensive experience as teaching academics in higher education giving credence to their work. Adequate resourcing and funding ensured the successful development of the system, subsequent system

enhancements and ongoing operations. Consultation and input with multiple service areas ensured interconnections between the university systems and technologies were successfully integrated to ensure the useability for students and staff. These interconnections and the relationships built across the university provided the basis for levering change in all contexts of practice, that is, at the university, faculty, school, course and unit level (Amey, 2006; Marshall, et al., 2011). The creativity and communication skills to bring about a change in culture and to acquire adequate funding were examples of the innovator and broker CVF leadership roles demonstrated by the leaders (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; Zulu, et al., 2004). Most notably, the leadership team:

- ensured eVALUate integrated with the University's internal data gathering and reporting systems and other related systems;
- liaised with Information Management Services to construct the online system within the student portal, ensuring the useability and reliability of data gathering and reporting facilities; and
- worked with central operational areas such as Staff Services to ensure all teaching staff (sessional and contract teachers), on and off-shore have equitable access to eVALUate.

Leadership by the PVCA was essential in negotiating with the staff union in establishing the procedures for reporting student feedback (Den Hollander, Oliver, & Jones, 2007). The union expressed concerns over the ownership and reporting of student feedback data (qualitative and quantitative), identification of teaching staff in reports and the privacy of student feedback for use in academic performance. Considerable effort was made to ensure a focus on quality enhancement and the transparency of reports for all relevant stakeholders. A commitment to close the feedback loop for students also guided the values and procedures that shaped the system and practices. The focus on getting the task done, whilst ensuring people were cared for and developed are examples of the developer and monitoring roles demonstrated by the leaders (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; Zulu, et al., 2004).

Pedagogy

Leadership and pedagogy was provided by key academics from the Office of Teaching and Learning. Evidence-based practice informed all aspects of the system; the development of the instruments, reporting of data and method for closing the feedback loop with students. A comprehensive scan of successful evaluation systems in Australia and internationally and a comprehensive review of the literature in the field of higher education pedagogy in outcome-focused education, student learning and evaluation systems was undertaken to determine best practices in student evaluations. The literature indicates that, in order to evaluate the quality of teaching, the quality of learning and subsequent achievement of learning outcomes should be evaluated (Barrie, 2000; Carey & Gregory, 2003; Huba & Freed, 2000). This learning outcomes principle and the acknowledgement of the teacher and learner partnership in student-centred learning were at the heart of all developments (Archer, Cantwell, & Bourke, 1999; Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Candy, Crebert, & O'Leary, 1994; Coates,

2005; Fenwick, 2001; Pintrich, Roeser, & De Groot, 1994; Ramsden & Entwistle, 1981; Scott, 2005; Zhao & Kuh, 2004).

An effective evaluation model and quality culture for improving teaching and learning had operated in the School of Physiotherapy since 1999 (Tucker, et al., 2003) and the experiences learnt from this model were exploited. This online system featured a culture of student and staff reflection on teaching and learning, transparency of results (student comments were available to all students and academics at the School), open discussion and sharing of teaching and learning strategies, closing the feedback loop and a shared commitment to quality improvement. Sizable improvements in graduate feedback on teaching quality, attainment of generic skills and overall satisfaction were achieved in CEQ and were directly attributed to the culture of improvement within the school (Tucker, Jones, & Straker, 2008). Experiences gained from the Physiotherapy evaluation system strengthened Curtin's decision to adopt a system that: asks students what they bring to the teaching and learning partnership; is transparent in reporting results; closes the feedback loop and commits to quality improvement.

Improving the student learning experience using the eVALUate system

Students can give feedback about their unit and their teacher(s) using two separate surveys: the eVALUate unit survey and the eVALUate teaching survey. The development and validation of each survey, including pedagogical underpinnings have been published elsewhere (Tucker, Oliver, and Gupta, 2013 in press; Oliver, Tucker, Gupta, and Yeo, 2008). Unlike most student evaluation of teaching surveys, the eVALUate unit survey focusses on student perceptions of what is helping or hindering their achievement of learning outcomes (Oliver, Tucker, Gupta, & Yeo, 2008).

In brief, the eVALUate unit survey is automatically available online for all undergraduate and postgraduate coursework units at all Curtin's Australian campuses and all major offshore campuses. Students enrolled on a full time basis normally enrol in four units each teaching period. Each year there are six main eVALUate events with additional events created to cover almost every teaching study period. All units are evaluated each time they are available in any study period. The teaching survey is only available for student feedback when requested online by the teacher seeking feedback. For any unit, there may be one or more teachers, and students can give feedback for as many teachers as they choose within the one unit.

Online aggregated reports are available to all students, staff and the general public at various levels (unit or program) and more detailed reports containing quantitative and qualitative feedback for each teaching location and mode is available to the unit coordinator and head of school. Curtin executive are provided with the analysed data with recommendations for improvement to influence student learning. Course and

unit eVALUate reports are used in all Annual and Comprehensive Course Reviews. The eVALUate reports are disaggregated so that students from different campuses, locations and modes of study are represented. This provides unit coordinators and heads of schools with fine grained information about all student experiences so that improvements are focused (Den Hollander, et al., 2007; Jones & Oliver, 2008). Additional reports are produced manually for senior executive, faculties, schools, offshore locations for monitoring and reporting on teaching and learning quality and for school reviews.

The effective implementation of eVALUate ensured the success of course review and led to a subsequent university-wide project of curriculum renewal called Curriculum 2010. Both eVALUate and the processes that have been developed as part of Curriculum 2010 are now integral to quality improvement at Curtin (Den Hollander, et al., 2007; Jones & Oliver, 2008; Oliver & Ferns, 2009; Oliver, Jones, & Ferns, 2010; Oliver, Jones, Tucker, & Ferns, 2007). A full description of the system, how it works, reports available online, the mechanism for closing the feedback loop with students and the use of qualitative and quantitative feedback to improve the student experience is published elsewhere (Tucker, In press).

University policy and procedures were developed to provide a framework in which teaching and learning is evaluated using eVALUate. The procedures outline the access to reports and use of eVALUate results to for improving the student experience, for staff reflection and scholarship, benchmarking, evidencing teaching performance and recognising teaching excellence.

Communication and education

The leadership team communicated continually with the wider community throughout the development and implementation stages of the system. The framework developed by the International Association for Public Participation best describes the factors resulting in a high level of impact for Curtin community; that is, to inform, consult, involve, collaborate with and empower students and staff (IAP2, 2012). In particular, communications focused on the shared commitment and vision, strategy and pedagogy. A series of open forums were conducted at the university to ensure widespread dissemination of information, foster discussion and to listen to concerns that could be fed back to the Steering Committee. Information papers were disseminated regularly and progress reports presented at University, Faculty and School Teaching and Learning Committees. Such strategies were paramount in ensuring staff understood the internal and external demands for quality and could respond optimally to the cultural change associated with the new evaluation system (Zulu, et al., 2004).

By ensuring staff and student were adequately informed, consulted and involved in the development and implementation of the system, concerns and aspirations raised by the University community were acknowledged. Where possible these concerns were acted on and feedback was provided back to the community to ensure

stakeholders were advised on how their involvement had influenced decisions. The participatory decision-making strategies undertaken ensured collaborative partnerships whereby stakeholders (students and staff) were involved in advising and formulating recommendations and innovative solutions to the eVALUate system.

When piloting eVALUate, online surveys for students and staff were undertaken to gather feedback on the system and tools. The team worked with student groups to ensure that the survey items were valid and reliable, comprehensive yet sufficiently succinct to ensure student participation. The team worked with senior executive, heads of schools, and deans of teaching and learning to ensure eVALUate fulfilled accountability requirements and the data was usable for the demands of continuous quality improvement. Consultation with statisticians ensured the statistical validity and reliability of the survey instruments. Communication and collaborative partnerships with senior executive and providers in offshore locations ensured the successful rollout of eVALUate offshore. This involved visits and meetings with students and staff at Australian and key offshore locations.

The coordination and management of eVALUate is situated within the Office of Teaching and Learning at the University. This unit provides leadership and support for teaching and learning through its activities in academic professional development, research and scholarship, course management, curriculum design and review. The organisational position of this unit is vital for the creation of a culture of support and continuous improvement for academics in the evaluation process. Leadership within the university is provided from the Office through the development of teaching and learning strategic plans, collaborations with national and international leaders in the field of teaching and learning, and scholarly activities resulting in strong networks with multiple areas of the university and the empowerment and support of academic staff.

Professional development and support is provided to academic staff in multiple ways. Comprehensive resources have been developed to provide guidelines for unit, course and faculty staff on their roles and responsibilities on the: use of eVALUate reports; interpretation of results and response rates (representativeness of sample); and how they might assist teaching colleagues to use eVALUate results to improve student learning. Similar guidelines were also developed for promotion panel members. Resources have been created for improving practice associated with each eVALUate unit survey item. The University's Teaching and Learning booklet, an annual publication which updates staff on all teaching and learning matters, includes a dedicated chapter on eVALUate, ways to close the feedback loop for students and practical tips for improving teaching practice using eVALUate results. Professional development for all staff is provided regularly through the Foundations of Teaching and Learning Program and a range of leadership programs (Unit Coordinator, Course Coordinator and Heads of Schools Programs). Professional development for leadership was essential in effecting cultural change in teaching and learning that would effect evaluation adoption and use (Marshall, et al., 2011).

Recognition of early successes

An important strategy in changing culture is the recognition and reward of early achievements. Curtin celebrated a number of achievements resulting from the implementation of eVALUate. Most notably, early success was the improvement in Curtin Ranking in Australia in 2007 and 2008 and the success in LTPF, receiving $500,000 funding from the Federal Government in 2007 (Armitage, 2006). Significant improvements in student satisfaction were evident at course, faculty and whole of university level and publicised through the achievement of a University and National Citation Award (Amey, 2006).

Curtin was commended by AUQA in 2009 for the development and implementation of the student evaluation system, eVALUate, to improve learning and teaching. The Panel commended the University for developing robust evaluation instruments, their systematic use across the University and acting on the results to sustain continuous quality improvements in a range of areas at the University (Australian Universities Quality Agency, 2009). The 2009 AUQA Panel confirmed the positive impact which the eVALUate unit survey had on learning and teaching. Specifically, the AUQA comments affirmed: 1) the system's capacity to obtain student feedback (from all campuses and students from partner institutions; 2) the mandatory use of eVALUate; 3) the publication of unit results for all Curtin students and staff; 4) the online system for closing the feedback loop for students; 5) reporting through university, faculty, school and campus level committees; and 6) the use of eVALUate results for academic staff work planning, promotion purposes and rewards to staff. The Panel confirmed the use of student feedback for the purpose of quality improvement: from addressing poor teaching through the use of the 'traffic light' system, for making curricular and pedagogical changes in units, to its use in annual and comprehensive reviews. The Panel also confirmed the processes established for quality assurance: the regular reporting mechanisms, monitoring and assessment of progress against the Strategic Plan and annual Operational Plan and the achievement of key performance indicators. The Panel noted the monitoring of key performance indicators by the faculties that were reported regularly at Academic Board, and the active, systematic and comprehensive approach to the monitoring of student feedback and academic standards at open forums such as Academic Board monitoring meetings.

Consolidation

The acceptance of eVALUate is largely positive, although misconceptions and concerns are sometimes expressed by individuals. To address these concerns and to further contribute to the knowledge on student evaluation of teaching and learning, research on the system and data is ongoing. To date, the research has focused on the validation of the instruments (Tucker, Oliver, and Gupta, 2011; Oliver, Tucker, Gupta, and Yeo, 2008), which students give feedback and what they report in evaluation systems (Oliver, Tucker, and Pegden, 2007; Pegden and Tucker, 2009; Pegden and Tucker, 2010), student motivation and engagement (Tucker, Oliver, and Pegden 2007;

Tucker and Pegden, 2008), and relationships between student feedback and graduate feedback (Jones and Tucker, 2005) and student outcomes (Tucker, Pegden, and Yorke, 2012). Biannual University Aggregated Reports are accessible online for all students and staff. This report provides a full analysis of the response rates, quantitative and qualitative results of the eVALUate unit survey at the University and Faculty levels for each semester and includes five year trends. This analysis details which demographic subgroups participate in eVALUate, the percentage agreement for each subgroup and reports on the CEQuery analysis of the comments made by students on the best aspects of their learning and what they believe should be improved (Oliver, Tucker, & Pegden, 2006, 2007; Scott, 2005). Key research findings from the eVALUate data are also outlined in this report and have resulted in increasing confidence and acceptance by staff in the eVALUate surveys and tool.

Promotion of student evaluation to students and staff is relentless within the University (via presentations, student publications, Curtin diaries and calendars, postcards, posters, emails, workshops and Curtin websites) and to the wider community (particularly at conferences and through journal publications). eVALUate reports were embedded into subsequent University-wide initiatives, such as Curriculum Quality Enhancement and Curriculum 2010, and are now integral to indicators which focus on improving student learning within in the Teaching and Learning Enabling Plan.

Evaluation

eVALUate has influenced students' overall academic experience of higher education because it focuses on learning, it shows that student feedback is valued, and ensures that every student has the opportunity to engage in evaluation. Engaging students in the partnership of teaching and learning has provided them with the opportunity to give anonymous feedback on their learning. Students feel they have a voice, that collectively they can make a difference to their learning experiences and that their views are respected:

- The scope of eVALUate ensures a wide range of issues can be accessed and then improved on or continued by tutors, lecturers and university management to provide the best service for students (Student Guild).
- eVALUate is an easy way to get our views across and you know that you'll be heard (Student)
- I think eVALUate gives the opportunity for students to have a say and facilitate change where needed and also to acknowledge the good things as I believe in both positive and constructive criticism (Student).

Since the implementation of eVALUate, students are reporting that their learning experiences have improved (from 2006 to 2012). Aggregated scores for Item 11 (Overall, I am satisfied with this unit) from more than 40,000 survey submissions each semester show that there has been a steady and significant increase in student agreement by 5.7% over the six year period. The eVALUate unit survey also asks students to reflect on their contribution to learning (Items 8-10). Students have

reported a significantly higher percentage agreement with these items, particularly in student motivation (I am motivated to achieve the learning outcomes in this unit) where there has been an increase of 7.1%. Item 5 (Feedback on my work helps me to achieve the learning outcomes) has made the greatest improvement over time (8.3%) and Item 7 (The quality of teaching) is notably higher (6.0%).

Student response rates are also increasing. The target response rate (35%) set by Senior Executive was achieved in two years and since 2008, University-wide student response rates for the unit survey are typically 43-46%. The focus for Curtin has been on achieving representative response rates at unit level. In 2012, 58% of units with enrolment numbers greater than 100 achieved a representative response rate (that is, staff can be 95% confident that the actual percentage agreement is within 10% (±) of the observed percentage agreement for the total student group enrolled in the unit).

The following statements represent the views of Curtin students and senior executive:
- eVALUate acts to enhance the student learning experience at Curtin by providing accurate feedback to all levels of the university. This has benefited the university by indicating the changing needs of students faster, allowing for more accurate adjustments in the learning culture and ensuring that Curtin is at the cutting edge of tertiary education (Student Guild)
- The eVALUate reports are fantastic and have made a huge impact on my role and the constructive work I am now able to do with staff regarding teaching and learning. eVALUate is so objective and easy to use. I am able to discuss with each staff member their unit's performance, and offer feedback and suggestions on areas which can be improved. Together we are able to identify why a particular aspect of the unit has either improved or where improvements are needed based on the previous semesters results and this discussion is positive, non-judgemental and developmental. In some areas in the School we have already been able to make improvements for student learning and I have found the staff respond well to the reports. Lecturers are including documentation of their changes to the units, based on the feedback they have received through eVALUate, in their next unit outline, so that students can see feedback is worthwhile (Head of School).
- At our Offshore Campus, staff have recognised the great potential of eVALUate to assist them in responding to student feedback on units of study. eVALUate enables staff to review and separate unit design issues (units which are designed by the Bentley home campus) from those of teaching quality and delivery of units at the offshore campus. Staff are now able to conduct unit reviews using eVALUate as a basis to provide suggestions for design change and at the same time identify strategies to improve teaching and learning to assist student achieve stated learning outcomes (Dean of Teaching and Learning, Offshore Campus).
- I am writing to comment on the impact of eVALUate. In my view, this program has been the most important macro development at Curtin in Teaching and Learning. The design of the system is excellent and implementation has been very smooth. It gives us for the first time a way of identifying major weaknesses and correcting them (Pro-Vice Chancellor, 2006).

The uptake of academic staff requesting teaching surveys is increasing annually. Currently nearly 2000 teaching surveys are requested each semester and in 2011, over 19,000 teaching surveys were submitted by students in a semester event. For the unit survey, over 45,000 surveys are submitted each semester. Continued monitoring, system enhancements and innovations ensure that eVALUate continues to meet the needs of Curtin stakeholders (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; Zulu, et al., 2004).

Although there is considerable variability in systems and instruments used for surveying the experience of students in their units across the higher education sector (Barrie, Ginns, & Symons, 2008), the recent uptake of eVALUate by other Australian universities will enable the benchmarking of students reported experiences in teaching and learning and cross-institutional research into teaching and learning.

Future Challenges and directions

Curtin has now been using the eVALUate system for seven years and data from the system is embedded within the quality culture. Higher institutions are currently exploring new and innovative ways to transform teaching and learning in response to global trends particularly related to the rapid increase in the availability of interactive learning technologies. Learners are increasingly embracing independent learning opportunities through free, online educational offerings. Students' perceptions of their learning through new approaches, settings, technologies and pedagogies will be essential to direct future teaching and learning practices.

Whilst student feedback is an important measure that informs quality, there is considerable debate within the sector about other measures of student performance, engagement and outcomes particularly in relation to student transformation through learning (Gvaramadze, 2011). Understanding student perceptions of their learning and teaching will provide universities with a better understanding of the connection between their experience and student outcomes (Arthur, Tumbré, Paul, and Edens, 2003; Davidovitch and Soen, 2009; Duque and Weeks 2010; Mustafa and Chiang 2006; Spooren and Mortelmans, 2006; Stark-Wroblewski, Ahlering, and Brill 2007; Tucker, Pegden, and Yorke, 2012). A systematic approach will be needed to determine the effects of educational initiatives, innovations and pedagogies. An evidence based approach, including best practice, pedagogy and analytics on current and past practices will not only ensure appropriate decision making in the development of future teaching and learning strategies, but also better understand and optimise learning and educational transformation in the environments in which it occurs.

Conclusion

eVALUate, an online student evaluation system has been adopted and embedded at Curtin and has brought a significant cultural shift in thinking and practice in teaching and learning. That shift is centred on moving away from thinking about specific teaching practices, to focussing on student learning. Students are reporting increased

levels of satisfaction in their learning experiences and greater student engagement and motivation. The implementation of this system has been informed by, and contributed to, research into student evaluation of teaching within a university-level outcomes approach to learning. Open and transparent student feedback about student learning has provided a strong focus for quality improvement at Curtin and the development of strategies to improve the student experience.

Author bio

Beatrice Tucker is the Evaluation Manager in the area of Curtin Teaching and Learning and has been integral to the development, validation, implementation and evaluation of eVALUate, Curtin's online student evaluation system since 2005. She provides leadership for the area and is responsible for the educational guidance and support at all levels for academic staff at Curtin. Her research publication areas include the evaluation of teaching and learning, undergraduate student sources of stress, cardiopulmonary physiotherapy science and its clinical application.

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