Arts Teaching and Learning

Faculty of Arts USE (Unit of Study Evaluation) Procedures

Preamble
The Faculty of Arts seeks to foster an environment where quality and innovation in teaching and learning are valued and supported by clear policies and resources. The use of the Unit of Study (UOS) Evaluations across the Faculty is an important mechanism for measuring and improving quality. In 2004-5 the Teaching and Learning Committee conducted research into existing practices and attitudes to the role of USE in teaching evaluation. As a result of the findings of this research, the committee now brings a series of recommendations to Policy and Review.

Background
The USE survey is an important monitoring tool designed to gauge, very broadly, students’ perceptions with regard to a number of key aspects of their learning experience in a particular UOS. It is intended to be used in combination with a variety of formal and informal methods of evaluation relating to more specific aspects of teaching practices. The Academic Board Policy states that each UOS should be formally evaluated at least once every three years, and the University Learning and Teaching Committee recognises the USE survey as a formal tool for the evaluation of student learning. As most of the questions in the USE mirror those administered in the SCEQ, the USE survey can help to identify areas of weakness that may impact upon student responses in the SCEQ.

All Schools in the Faculty of Arts employ the USE Survey as an effective method of formal evaluation. At present, however, there is significant variation across the Faculty in the administration of these surveys and in the reporting and use of the information gathered. The adoption of a consistent Faculty approach would enhance the scope offered by the USE for the review and improvement of curriculum development and teaching practices at every level, from the support and development of individual teachers to Faculty-wide initiatives for teaching improvement.

Recommendations
The T&L Committee makes recommendations with regard to the following:

1. Timing of evaluations
2. Schools to coordinate
3. UoS coordinators’ feedback
4. Response to high level of dissatisfaction
5. Confidentiality
6. Relation of USE to PM&D and Promotion
7. Review of Faculty questions
8. Posting of Faculty policy
9. Increasing staff awareness of policy and implementation of USE.

1. The normal procedure should be that a UOS is evaluated at a minimum every third time it is taught. This interval allows time to make meaningful adjustments and assess their specific impact before formal re-evaluation of the UOS as a whole. It also helps to guard against the ‘evaluation fatigue’ which some UOS coordinators report is developing in some students.

There may be exceptions to this principle. Units of Study that are not taught annually should be evaluated every second time they are taught, to prevent an undue lag of time between evaluations. In particular instances, e.g. where a high level of student dissatisfaction with a UOS has been expressed, more frequent use of the Survey may also be appropriate.

In the interim periods other questionnaires and evaluation tools, including but not limited to those developed by the Institute for Teaching and Learning, as well as self- and peer-review strategies and reference to the scholarship of teaching and learning, should be used with the aim of drawing out different issues about the quality of teaching and student learning, and gauging the impact of alternative approaches, methodologies, teaching styles and learning activities.

Care should be taken to educate students about the value of the evaluation process for their own experience of teaching and learning, and to encourage them to recognise and reflect upon their own collaborative involvement in their learning experience.

2. The distribution of the USE Survey should be coordinated at the School level and not left up to individual UOS coordinators. This will ensure that the quality assurance process, including reflection, reporting, and feedback to students, is systematized and able to be monitored.

3. UOS coordinators’ feedback to students on USE evaluation results may be given in a variety of ways, including via departmental websites, UOS outlines and direct discussion with students in class. In addition, we recommend that every UOS coordinator provide a short formal response to the USE feedback to their Head of School, thereby ensuring that the faculty is able to demonstrate a commitment to quality assurance and best practice.

4. Where a high level of dissatisfaction is recorded with a particular UOS, Heads of School should work with individual UOS coordinators and Chairs of Department to identify areas of concern and develop strategic methods for improving the students’
experience of learning.

5. Heads of School and Chairs of Department should treat USE Survey results, insofar as they relate to the performance of individual staff members, as confidential information. However, aggregations of data should be made more widely available to guide and support the development of policy about the quality of learning and teaching at departmental, school and faculty level. Much of the information gathered by the USE is of more value at this aggregated level, allowing the Faculty to direct attention to professional development, resource and infrastructure issues, the impact of particular assessment strategies, student workload etc, or to monitor the Faculty-wide experience of particular types of students, e.g. junior students or special entry students.

6. The implications of USE Surveys and other teaching evaluation surveys for PM&D and Promotion should be clarified and made more transparent to staff. The T&L Committee should liaise with Faculty and University Promotions Committees to ensure that the Academic Board policy on this issue is thoroughly understood. The USE is not a measure of staff performance and in PM&D and Promotion discussions the crucial issue for a staff member is to demonstrate that they are taking evaluation seriously and responding appropriately and effectively to feedback from students.

7. The four faculty designated questions should be reviewed as the final stage of the USE Project, with consideration given to the feedback gathered from Heads of School and UOS Coordinators. It is recommended that the faculty questions be routinely reviewed every three years.

8. A clear statement of Faculty policy on the USE survey, including these recommendations, should be placed on the Teaching and Learning Website.

9. The Faculty, through the Teaching and Learning Committee and other key leaders in the evaluation process, including heads of school and chairs of department, should endeavour to make staff more aware of the role of the university policy concerning USE, the use of the USE survey as a standardized evaluation tool across the University, and the advice and support offered by the ITL in relation to the policy.

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