Strategies for Improving Subject Experience Survey (SES) Response Rates

The Subject Experience Survey (SES) is an important feature of the teaching and learning landscape. The information provided through the surveys can be useful in reviewing subjects and identifying areas for subject improvement. The SES provides insights about students’ experience of teaching and learning which can be used by academics to improve the delivery of classes, the preparation of course materials and methods of assessment. This document has been prepared by TALQAC to provide academics with:

- an insight into the trends in the SES rates within the University of Melbourne; and
- some strategies about how to improve the SES rates in their subjects.

### WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE TRENDS IN SES RESPONSE RATES?

- SES response rates have been declining for both undergraduate and postgraduate students.
- Although there has been an increased decline in SES response rate since the introduction of the online survey in Semester 1, 2011, the trend was towards a steady decline prior to this.
- Maintaining satisfactory response rates for all student surveys is important to ensure we understand students’ views and can act upon them as part of the University’s quality improvement cycle.

### SES Response rates, University of Melbourne Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>S1, 09</th>
<th>S2, 09</th>
<th>S1, 10</th>
<th>S2, 10</th>
<th>S1, 11</th>
<th>S2, 11</th>
<th>S1, 12</th>
<th>S2, 12</th>
<th>S1, 13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>63.1%</td>
<td>61.3%</td>
<td>61.1%</td>
<td>58.7%</td>
<td>56.0%</td>
<td>42.6%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>39.2%</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>77.4%</td>
<td>74.8%</td>
<td>75.6%</td>
<td>73.3%</td>
<td>60.5%</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What do we know about SES response rates at the University of Melbourne

- Response rates are highest in Semester 1
- Non standard teaching periods (eg summer and winter) have much lower response rates
- Graduates subjects have higher response rates than undergraduate subjects
- Overseas and female students are more likely to complete the SES than Australian or male students
- SES scores for female respondents tend to be higher than that of male respondents
- Students tend to complete all of their surveys or none of their surveys
- There does not appear to be a significant preference for completing the SES in a poorly rated subject compared to a highly rated subject

(Based on Jones, B (2013), Institutional Planning and Performance, SES Response rates 2011-2013- Appendix A)

10 tips to improve SES response rates

Remember that you can use these strategies in combination with each other to maximise student response rates.

1. Explain to students the importance of the SES to the University and to improve teaching and learning; importantly, emphasise that you value their feedback
2. Ensure that you give feedback to students on how you have acted on their responses (see TALQAC guidelines on the SES website)
3. Heads of Departments/Schools via Faculty officers, can send personalised emails to staff asking them to remind students about the SES, rather than a generic university email to all staff
4. Heads of Departments/Schools via Faculty officers can send personalised emails to staff describing the proportion of students who have completed the SES in their subject
5. Send reminder emails to students in your specific subjects, with direct links to SES; send reminders on Fridays- more people are likely to respond to requests to complete surveys later in the working week
6. Use social media: send Facebook and Twitter reminders on both faculty and university websites
7. Consider offering incentives to students who complete the SES
8. Provide a time in your class to allow students to complete SES (this can be done on mobile devices); you will need to leave the room while students are completing the surveys.
9. Minimise the number of surveys that students are asked to complete
10. Share any strategies that have improved SES response rates with colleagues; TALQAC wants to hear about them too. Please send your feedback to the Chair, TALQAC.

(Based on Doughney (2013), CSHE: Strategies for improving student response rates to online surveys and other UoM surveys- Appendix B)