

In early 2014, 143 second year SCU students responded to a qualitative survey asking what helped them to learn in their first year of study at university. The students pointed to helpful ways in which the teacher had increased their understanding, supported their needs, and enabled them to take control of their own learning.

Increased student understanding

Students repeatedly spoke of how staff increased their understanding through the methods and the learning environment that they created. Here are some of the students' comments:

"Having workshop type lessons (helped)"

"Online discussion boards were really helpful because I got to talk to other students, not just the lecturer or tutor"

"Being in a study group is very helpful. This was encouraged through teachers and support staff."

Students also pointed to how instructive methods of teaching helped to improve their understanding of what they needed to know and how to go about this. Comments included:

"Gave interesting examples that related directly to our future"

"Delivered information in an easy to understand way"

"The teacher really spelled out to us what was required and the steps necessary to achieve this outcome"

"Clear overview and introduction to unit content and assignment expectations in tutorials"

"Teaching was linear and there was a logical sequence. Complex terms were simplified and it was never assumed you had prior knowledge of the subject."

Supported student needs

Students also spoke of how helpful it was having staff who supported their needs. Interaction with staff was mentioned:

"What helped me the most was the availability of teachers and staff"

"Face to face interaction with good lecturers and tutors in a controlled classroom environment was the basis of my successful studies in my first year"

Structuring the course in ways that supported their life both in and outside of class was mentioned:

"The online courses were structured in a way that we could live our lives and we weren't often restricted to a certain place and time for lectures. However, if we wanted to, the lecturer would convene a Collaborate session and we would be able to talk and comment as if face-to-face."

Staff attitude was another aspect repeatedly mentioned for supporting needs and giving them confidence. Typical comments included:

"Helpfulness and approachability of lecturers"

"Open to questions, explained things in helpful way"

"Gave their most and were genuine in attitude"

"Staff are very friendly, professional and happy to assist when you have a concern. It feels like they want you to succeed!"

Enabled students to take control of their own learning

Students repeatedly pointed to the importance of the teacher being well organised for helping them to take control of their own learning. Comments included:

“Clear outline of how the session would run including assessment details and due dates”

“Timely feedback from teachers definitely helped before final due dates”

“Having lecture or tutorial printables available at least three days before the class (was helpful)”

“Teachers helped most who structured assignments in such a way that required regular attention to course content in order to pass.”

Students also valued resources for self-study and pointed to the following as being helpful:

“Having the lectures and study guide online helped if I felt I needed to go over information”

“Extra resources for reading and quizzing my understanding of concepts”

“Access to so much information via Blackboard including recorded lectures was great for exam review.”

Summary pointers from the students

Increase understanding by:

- delivering information in a clear, linear, logical sequence
- explaining complex terms
- providing step by step instructions
- providing hands-on, practical experiences
- providing plenty of opportunities for discussion with peers and the teacher.

Support student needs by:

- being available, open to questions, and helpful
- structuring courses in ways that meet their lives both in and out of university
- being well organised in advance.

Enable students to take control of their own learning by:

- providing resources in a timely way
- providing feedback in a timely way.

For more insights from the students, see the [Postcards](#) available on the Southern Cross University Inclusive Curricula and Teaching website.