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From the Editor:

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'Learning Matters at Lingnan' are short papers that aim to promote a dialogue on teaching and learning. I encourage all staff to consider this as a vehicle for sharing thoughts on educational issues as they might affect us at the University. If you feel you have something which might be appropriate for inclusion in an issue of this publication, then please forward it to the TLC. I would be delighted if staff (and not only academic staff) from outside the Teaching and Learning Centre were to be prominent or even occasional contributors.



Principles of OPSIT

Why OPSIT

Ongoing Participatory Student Input into Teaching (OPSIT)

This edition of *Learning Matters at Lingnan* aims to suggest to you a formative way of evaluating teaching and learning by obtaining ardent feedback from students on an ongoing basis by means of online technology; and to canvass your views regarding its developmental value and contribution to the improvement of teaching and learning with the intention of identifying needed changes and implementing them before the end of the current semester.

There are several principles that underlie this formative evaluation approach.

- The main purpose of evaluation is to enhance student learning.
- 'Formative' refers to the ongoing collection of information about various aspects of the subject or the teaching of it in order to check whether it is achieving its stated objectives and is effectively supporting student learning.
- This proposed ongoing evaluation is not to replace the end-of-semester Course and Teaching Evaluations (CTEs) that provide information about the cumulative impact of the whole subject and the teaching on students' learning.
- It is important that the information an instructor collects in the process of evaluation belongs to the instructor.
- Participation in the formative evaluation should be voluntary on the part of the instructor as well as of the students and that the system can even permit customisation of the questionnaire for the collection of specific feedback from students.
- The flexibility of online technology makes continuous evaluation possible to provide data at all times throughout the year for adjustments to be made to the advantage of students currently enrolled.

Current student evaluations of teaching (CTEs) are conducted too haphazardly and too hurriedly to be either reliable measures of teaching or useful reflections of actual learning. Squeezed in at the end of a class toward the end of the semester, they are generally rapid-fire, tabular in form, and cursory in focus. Their only virtue is their high return rate. But a high yield on indifferent

Advantages of OPSIT

responses, often thoughtlessly dashed off, and under the pressure of 'evaluation overload', produces very unreliable data. The results are very dubious indicators of teaching effectiveness, with no developmental value in improving the quality of teaching. If we are serious about student input, we must allow sufficient time and scope for student responses to instruction, which would also include student reflections on their own learning.

We propose the establishment of an online, ongoing student-response-to-instruction form, available at all times throughout the year, permitting students to voice their comments during the semester so as to maximise the developmental value of student input.

OPSIT responses would be confidential between student and instructor. OPSIT would be voluntary for the instructor as well as for the student (a contrast to CTE's in both regards). However, if they wish, instructors could excerpt OPSIT responses if they want to show evidence of improvement in their teaching (either to Head of Department or to ASRC). Although a template OPSIT form will be offered to participating instructors, the form can be adapted for each course by the individual instructor.

There are several advantages to OPSIT.

First, the student feels a part of the course s/he is taking. If there are complaints about the teaching, they will not be dismissive, as they tend to be at the end of the year. There will be a sense of student ownership of pedagogy in the course.

Second, the system will highlight thoughtful rather than whimsical comments on teaching, and the emphasis will be on constructive criticism rather than snap judgments.

Third, the opportunity afforded the instructor to address the criticism before the end of the semester allows OPSIT to work as a developmental tool, which will be an ongoing non-judgmental aid to improvements in teaching. OPSIT stresses the 'formative' whereas CTE offers 'summative' judgments.

Fourth, OPSIT testimonies will be a more balanced and more responsible expressions that CTE's currently are. The more extended comments will 'contextualise' the comments, and reflect more accurately than the CTEs the student's fairness in making the criticism.

Fifth, in creating a sense of dialogue, OPSIT would reduce the adversarial cast in current student evaluations. OPSIT would expose the indifferent and lazy student who takes no interest in his/her own learning, and it provides a conscientious student with an effective voice for his/her concerns.

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N.B. We would like to hear your views regarding this proposed evaluation approach. Please send your comments to the Teaching and Learning Centre which will collate and present them for subsequent discussions by appropriate committees with a stake in the improvement of teaching and learning in this University.

This issue and the back issues of 'Learning Matters at Lingnan' can be retrieved from the following URL – <http://www.ln.edu.hk/tlc/level2/td.htm>.