lecturers ‘reflective learners’

An emphasis on self-improvement characterises ACU National’s process for evaluating teaching and learning, and evaluation results show “a good level of satisfaction” with courses and teaching.

Within a specified set of criteria, lecturers have flexibility in designing the evaluation forms given to their students at the end of each semester, and the student feedback shows them what areas, if any, require improvement.

“The spirit of our evaluation is that lecturers receive results which can help them improve their own teaching,” said School of Education (NSW) senior lecturer in Educational Assessment and Research Methods Dr Shukri Sanber, who is also coordinator of the University’s Unit Evaluation Program.

“Lecturers own the process and they own the results."

As part of the Unit Evaluation Program, students rate each unit in terms of the resources offered, assessment methods, outcomes, organisation, presentation and content. A further four optional categories include staff characteristics, student effort, student characteristics, and evaluation of teaching. The program also includes items that can be used to evaluate practicum, clinical and field work units.

“I think we are doing a very good job overall,” said Dr Sanber. “I have evidence to show that as a whole there’s a good level of satisfaction with our courses and staff teaching across the University.”

Lecturers are invited to select evaluation items from within the University’s Evaluation Item Bank, and may add up to four original new items. Once tested for their effectiveness, new items are incorporated into the Item Bank for others to use.

The current Item Bank has more than 150 questions suitable for the construction of evaluation forms, to which students respond on a five-point scale, from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”.

The current evaluation program grew out of a research project the University carried out between 1993 and 1995, and is supervised by the University’s Teaching and Learning Evaluation Committee.

With increasing Federal Government emphasis on quality teaching in the higher education sector, standardisation was introduced in 2003, with lecturers invited to include 12 University core items.

This year, a further evaluation instrument was introduced with a focus on the perceived quality of teaching. This instrument, Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET), includes 15 common items. Its administration is highly standardised. Lecturers are required to leave the teaching space when students complete the forms, under the supervision of an appointee.

“The evaluation data become meaningful when analysed for the class as a whole, and take into account the context within which the teaching and learning have taken place,” Dr Sanber said.

The evaluation forms administered by the Unit Evaluation Program provide students with the opportunity to add comments, and these are passed on to each lecturer anonymously. Some Heads of School invite lecturers to discuss their evaluation results with them and present action plans to improve any areas highlighted by students as less than satisfactory.

Evaluation results for the past three years may be viewed on the University’s website, with the teaching and learning of most units receiving the equivalent of at least four out of five ratings (see http://www.acu.edu.au/acu_national/teaching_and_learning).

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Affairs) Professor Gabrielle McMullen has overall responsibility for teaching and learning and its evaluation at ACU National. “Evaluation is key to assuring the quality of our courses, staff teaching and student learning,” Professor McMullen said. “It is part of our commitment to best practice.”