

Broadening staff involvement in student learning

This AUSSE Enhancement Guide suggests how teachers could broaden their involvement in student learning activities beyond lectures and tutorials.

Teaching within the boundaries of coursework

AUSSE data can be a key input to reviewing entire courses, revising assessment designs for first year students, or revising feedback practice in a single subject. The data show a clear link between student satisfaction and learning experiences that are challenging, enriching and supportive. Exploring your AUSSE data with these things in mind – support, challenge and enrichment – can suggest areas for extension or improvement.

There is, for example, a strong correlation in the AUSSE data between satisfaction and positive responses to the Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ) item 'Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations'. Improving the proportion of positive responses to this item could involve a minor, or a major review of case studies and set tutorial problems. You can explore options that go beyond the classroom in pursuit of enhancing student engagement. For example, you could design assessment tasks that can be completed through voluntary activities with community organisations, or in work placements.

This kind of change is valuable in its own right.

Teaching beyond the boundaries of coursework

The challenge this Enhancement Guide proposes is to broaden your teacherly involvement with students beyond the familiar boundaries of coursework and classroom. The challenge is to see learning, and your role in supporting learning, in a wider context.

The SEQ includes the item 'Received prompt written or oral feedback from teachers on your academic performance'. Feedback practice need not be limited to conventional activities like oral feedback on a group tutorial presentation, or written feedback on an assessment task. You could institute a debating event in a subject twice a semester with two teams of three tackling an impromptu topic. Each team might comprise two students and one academic from your department. You could be the moderator, or perhaps the Head of School could fill this role, with moderation involving commentary on the debate and a short email to the student team members assessing the content of their presentations. The emphasis is on fun, the outcome is learning, the feedback valuable. A voluntary seminar program for first year students is another forum in which students could receive valuable feedback that isn't linked to graded assessment.

Students as valuable and competent contributors

You can create challenging, enriching and supportive learning experiences by seeing students as valuable and competent contributors to the work of the university. Peer tutoring is a great example of this. Of course, peer tutoring isn't an option that appeals to all students, or that all students are able to participate in.

If you see students as valuable and competent contributors, and you accept that they are interested in challenge and enrichment, many options open up for broadening your involvement in student learning beyond coursework. For example, students can:

- take guided responsibility for literature searches and literature reviews

- assist in editorial activities related to academic journals such as layout, close checking of reference lists to ensure they conform with the relevant style, cross-checking in-text references with reference lists
- assist with translation of documents related to academic research
- introduce the speakers at every public lecture, and offer the vote of thanks
- play a substantial role in promoting the study of science and mathematics in primary and secondary schools as part of the university's community engagement activities.

Such roles do require preparation and guidance from academic and professional staff. Developing these roles as ongoing activities in your subject, department or faculty will lead to a growing fund of knowledge about how to structure preparation and guidance efficiently. Inevitably, those students who take on such roles can become part of the training effort for students who follow them. And inevitably there will be successes and some stumbles – that's the learning life.

Benefits of broadening staff involvement in student learning

The activities and roles are examples of structured learning experiences that deliver challenge and enrichment along with support. They can contribute to the development of a range of employability skills – communication, problem solving, teamwork, use of technology, self-management, using initiative. The activities they undertake, and the skills they develop, can be recorded in e-portfolios and appear on resumé. AUSSE data records a link between student satisfaction and the development of knowledge and skills that improve employability.

Just as importantly, such roles are likely to enhance the quality of relationships between students and staff. High quality relationships correlate in the AUSSE data with high student satisfaction.

Like most learning activities, student engagement is multi-faceted. Activities like those mentioned in this Guide will influence student responses to more than one AUSSE item. The student engagement payoff is potentially very high. The idea of a debating activity, for example, could influence student responses to several SEQ items such as:

- 'Making judgements about the value of information, arguments or methods, such as examining how others gather and interpret data and assessing the soundness of their conclusions'
- 'Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)'
- 'Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with teaching staff outside class'
- 'Relationships with teaching staff'.

Teachers can make a difference well beyond the classroom – and the research shows that this is where many of their most formative contributions can be made. Innovation in teaching practice that promotes student engagement does not need to be confined within the boundaries of coursework. Innovation beyond those boundaries is likely to improve student engagement and, consequently, contribute to improved learning outcomes.

About this guide

This AUSSE Enhancement Guide forms part of the suite of resources developed by ACER to assist institutions to enhance their students' engagement in effective educational practices. Visit www.acer.edu.au/ausse for further information about the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement.