

# Establishing student expectations

This AUSSE Enhancement Guide suggests how institutions might approach negotiating and meeting students' expectations in ways that help them manage their learning.

## Expectations make a difference

Students who complete the AUSSE Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ) will respond to the questionnaire items with expectations in mind. They will use those expectations as a standard against which to assess aspects of student engagement in your university or your faculty.

Your AUSSE results will be positive if you meet or exceed the expectations they have in mind. If their expectations are not met, your AUSSE results may be disappointing.

## Managing expectations

The most productive way to deal with student expectations is to address them on an ongoing basis through your quality improvement cycle. To be confident you are meeting student expectations you need to constantly review your understanding of them.

Students need to understand your perspective. If you build regular dialogue and feedback opportunities into your quality improvement plans, you also create opportunities to explain what you can do and are planning to do. You can also explain why there are some things you can't do reasonably or quickly. If your explanation is sound, your students will adjust their expectations. If there are no opportunities for dialogue and feedback, then the process of adjusting expectations is less likely to be productive.

## Incorporating SEQ items into your quality improvement cycle

One of the items on the SEQ is: 'Worked with other students outside class to prepare assignments.' This item comes from the Active Learning Scale. Learners are asked to indicate their level of agreement with this item by choosing one of four options – 'never', 'sometimes', 'often', 'very often'.

This item is based on evidence showing that positive student engagement, and good learning, is most likely to occur when students actively construct their own knowledge.

You know this item is on the SEQ. If you have prepared the ground, your answers to the following questions will be 'yes':

- Does your quality improvement cycle check that students are encouraged to work with other students when preparing assignments?
- Do you check that learners are reminded from time to time about expectations that they will work in teams on assignments, or seek support from other students in preparing for assignments? When are those checks made – at the beginning of semester, when an assignment task is set, some time before an assessment is due?

- Do you check that communication about these expectations is understood? How do you know that students clearly understand what is being communicated?
- Do teachers, learning support staff and other professional staff reinforce the same expectations?
- Do all staff ask students for ideas about how this kind of expectation might be met?
- Do you let students know how you are responding to their feedback on the ideas they offer?

Because you know what items are on the SEQ, you can structure your quality improvement plans and activities so that each item is covered appropriately. If items are not covered:

- you can adjust your processes, practices and plans
- you can build extra checks into your quality improvement cycle to ensure your processes, practices and plans are effective.

## Keeping it manageable

Your processes, practices and plans will usually deal with all the items on the SEQ. But you won't need a separate process, practice or plan for every SEQ item.

Perhaps you provide a student guide to all students before semester commences. A student guide would usually make clear statements about expectations in a particular subject or course. These expectations might include statements about the need for each student to support other students in completing assessment tasks, or to seek support from other students when tackling an assessment task. Where assessment tasks involve students working in teams, your guide might include statements about the expectations attached to each student's contribution to the team.

It's likely the student guide will be one consideration that influences the response to 'Worked with other students outside class to prepare assignments.'

The content of your student guide is also likely to influence the response to other items on the SEQ, including the following:

- 'Sought advice from academic staff'
- 'Used student learning support services'
- 'Used email to communicate with teaching staff'
- 'Number of assigned textbooks, books or book-length packs of subject readings'
- 'Providing the support you need to help you succeed academically'.

Of course, a student guide by itself won't be sufficient to secure a positive response to any of these items. You will have a range of processes, practices and plans in place that will influence the way in which learners manage their engagement in effective educational practices.

## 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](http://www.acer.edu.au/ausse) for further information about the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement.