Summary Report from the Distance Learning Student Survey 2013/14

The seventh annual survey of the School's DL students launched on 20 June 2014 and closed on 11 August 2014. As in previous years, this on-line survey remained primarily qualitative rather than quantitative in nature and with a strong course and module-level focus. Module-specific information is fed back to Course Directors and is not reported on here.

Once again, response rates remain low and a total number of 636 distance learners responded to the survey, a 24% response rate (vs. 29% last year), although this is not that unusual for a survey of this type.

Overall results

Key overall results from the survey are as follows:

- DL students were asked if they would recommend the School / the International Programmes to a friend who wanted to do a relevant postgraduate degree by distance learning and 83% of respondents stated they would, with just 8% stating they would not; a result very similar to that of last year;
- 40% of students stated they had accessed the School's Global Health Lecture Series on Moodle and of those, 79% had found them useful;
- Library usage saw a rise in the use of resources available of 10%, with 66% of student taking advantage of these. 18% of students responded that they did not need to (down for 28% last year) but there is still a small core of students who remain unable to access these (10% this year, vs. 11% last year). Of those resources available, the highest use was for electronic journals (80%), electronic books (49%) and library databases (24%). Overall, 73% of students agreed that the library resources and services were good enough for the needs (with only 8% disagreeing);
- Only a small number of distance learning students stated they had studied by mixed mode / blended learning (n=15), and of those students 67% took two modules. 86% of these were satisfied with the information provided to help them arrange to take modules by a different mode (7% disagreed) and all students who responded were satisfied with their experience of taking modules by a different mode;
- Of the CT, EP, GH and PH students who were asked about their experience of the Blackboard Collaborate online sessions, 61% stated they had participated in these and among those, 90% had found them helpful (with just 4% not finding them helpful). Among these students, 91% stated they had viewed the recorded sessions and 91% had also found them useful;
- Response rates by world region, based on the countries students named as their primary base (the only demographic data collected in the questionnaire), included 27% for Africa, 24% for Western Europe (exc. UK), 23% for North America and 17% for the UK. These four regions together constituted 79% of the study population. The overall dataset is thus reasonably representative by world region, albeit with slight under-representation of UK students once again.

Key themes arising from the comments (note that Section 2 was quantitative data only)

There was an excellent response from the students in terms of the time they had taken to produce comments and a large amount of qualitative data was submitted. Feedback was evenly split between positive comments and where it was felt that there were areas for improvement.

Section 1 Module Feedback

Learning materials and tutor feedback were frequently praised, in particular for EPM101, CT101, GHM104, IDM503 and PHM103. "*This module is one of the most interesting modules so far. The books and reading materials were very helpful.*" (PHM103 student).

There were some issues concerning module feedback, course materials, specifically accessing e-books and practical application of knowledge. "*The project process has felt chaotic, disorganised and inefficient at every step of the way. The initial proposal needed to have been approved by mid-Jan, yet the only feedback received from the course organiser was received in late December, thus leaving students only a few weeks to update the proposal, get it reviewed again and finally approved. Given that the student submissions were planned in advance, and were on time, I don't understand why this was so delayed in getting back to us.*" (GHM305 student).

Suggestions across all courses included clear pre-registration information about the lack of hard copy reading, exam review sessions and updating some of the examples, data and information given in course material. "*More online collaborate session, and some virtual classroom sessions where concepts are explained and then exercises are done. Learning statistics in such an abstract manner is very difficult.*" (EPM102 student).

Section 3 Overall Experience

The Collaborate sessions were highly praised, for example "*The Collaborate sessions, not Moodle, in Conflict and Health were excellent.*" with the caveat that it would be helpful if they were organised in advance and emailed to students. The reading lists were praised, although there were some suggestions of some instances of links being dead and not accessible. The course content was felt to be rich with specific praise for the wide variety of modes of learning and guest lecturers.

The problems centred on information being given in advance, "*I wish that assignment tasks had been presented at the beginning of the course so I could prepare.*" (Global Health comments), staggering the deadlines with comments on the formative assignment deadline being too early and students wanting more online tutorials "*more collaborate sessions for each subject and more time for assignments*" (Epidemiology comments) and an overall impression that some basic proofreading would solve slide punctuation and typos across all the departments.

Suggestions included more online resources such as videos and articles (given the changing nature of the field) recording the sessions so that they can be seen at a later date due to different time zones and further help on examinations "*I would like to see more links to previous exams questions and links to other practice sites.*" (Infectious Diseases comments).

Section 4 Learning Resources

There were a lot of comments about the accessibility of the website and accessing the library resources "*As with the whole UoL/LSHTM website, I still find it very difficult to navigate. There seem to be multiple different access areas which are still not clear 2 years into my course. I have learned the basics that I need to know to get to where I need to be but it remains very*

un-user friendly and I remember having massive problems at first trying to find the relevant areas." (Infectious Diseases comments). "*Difficult to know how to access it. Maybe a video tutorial on how to navigate the library might be helpful.*" (Epidemiology comments), however there were many positive comments about the ability to interact with tutors being widely appreciated and the exchanges with other students enabled a feeling of a distance learning community. "*…and to also learn from the comments and questions / answers of other students.*" (Global Health comments) and "*It was helpful. 1) It gives you the added confidence 2) interaction with teachers and fellow students in an otherwise distance program is a welcome experience.*" (Clinical Trials comments).

Next steps

Course Directors will shortly be provided with comprehensive course-specific data and comments and asked to consider these with their Course Committees and Module Organisers, before completing the (new) Surveys Action Plan.

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