Anecdotal Comment Summary Report

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Report Design Summary

This anecdotal comment summary report helps departments and colleges glean insights from a relatively large sample of open-ended comments. It is manually created by reviewing each comment to look for recurring noteworthy ideas. Key features of this report include:

- Action-oriented questions to begin the discussion between faculty members;

- Selectively chosen themes, to relate comments to institutional priorities and the main focus requested by the unit;

- Written in inviting, data-light language for easy reading and discussion.

Producing this report is labour intensive, but the impact is typically proportionally high. The following example is entirely fictional, intended only to showcase structure.

SLEQ Comment Report – Department of X

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This review is an anecdotal summary of themes found in SLEQ comments for core open-ended, course-focused questions from Fall 2020 to Winter 2023 in Department of X courses. The intent was to identify themes that could inform a curriculum redesign for the department, especially any themes related to assessment. Though not all themes below have direct relevance for this purpose, each has the potential to be used indirectly to inform this work. This analysis was done in accordance with the associated [Procedures](#).

Design Skills

Design labs and associated skills were commented on more than any other topic. Among comments about the design labs, prototyping and designing for production at scale were commonly mentioned by students in especially positive ways. In general, students were greatly appreciative of their design labs, especially when students were given projects with opportunities to integrate theoretical frameworks from several of their courses.

Despite generally favourable framing of comments about design labs, there were a couple of concerns that appeared multiple times. While many students were glad to see theories from several courses come together in a design lab, other students felt that they were at a disadvantage for not having taken those same courses as their peers, despite that those courses were not prerequisites. Several also mentioned some level of overwhelm with the scale of some design projects they faced in their design labs right at the beginning of their courses.

- Are there elements of elective courses that would be helpful to integrate into prerequisite courses such that students will not be disadvantaged by their choices of electives? Might there be other ways to address this disadvantage that some students perceive?
- Why might prototyping and designing for production at scale be spoken about so positively by students? Are there ways to alter other components of the design labs based on this?

Assessment Plans

Students often expressed frustration about courses with infrequent and high stakes assessments. They commented that they had stressful, high stakes assessments without sufficient feedback from their instructor for them to know where to direct their study efforts. Along these lines, students also shared concerns about course outcomes that are assessed only once, calling to question the value of the assessments in helping them learn and improve over time. Finally, there were several comments on the greater relative value of assessments where they were applying theory in an authentic context (i.e. design projects).

- How might the Department of X get students more feedback throughout their courses, such that they are better able to learn through the assessments?
- What are the most meaningful and authentic forms of assessment for the discipline?

Mid-Course Break Intensity

Though not as common, there were several comments that mentioned that the weeks before the November and February breaks are especially crowded whereas many other weeks are relatively calm. Comments included mentions of exhaustion, overwhelm, and stress. Students were generally clear that individual course expectations were not unreasonable, but the courses are so consistent in structure that the "busy" week for most Department of X courses seems to align perfectly such that it is the week before the break.

- How can schedules or assessment designed be changed such that the workload and content of courses are better distributed throughout the term to help students better manage their workload?

Group Work Pains

It is well known that students often express displeasure about group work across higher education, but instructors continue assigning it to build teamwork skills and to provide opportunities for peer-to-peer learning. Still, many students in the department's courses found the logistics of group work difficult to manage. Many concerns expressed are common concerns students have about group work, including unequal effort between group members, difficulty coordinating schedules to find times for collaboration, and individual understandings/effort not being adequately reflected in the group's single final product.

- How do Department of X instructors currently support group work in their courses, both directly and by design?
- Are there opportunities to scaffold the skill of group collaboration across the years of X, as to support students in offering the right amount of support to students across time as they develop this skill?